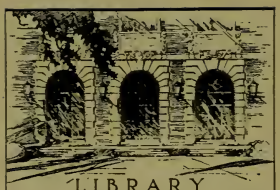

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AND

OTHER TALES.

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THE WOOING OF CATHERINE

AND OTHER TALES

BY

E. FRANCES POYNTER

AUTHOR OF

"MY LITTLE LADY,"

ETC., ETC.

"The changing guests, each in a different mood,
Sit at the roadside table, and arise—"
D. G. ROSSETTI.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE WOOING OF CATHERINE.

THE WOOING OF CATHERINE.

In thinking over what in common phrase are called the tragedies of life—ruined hopes, fallen ambitions, the perfidy of friends or lovers, and the like—there can be no tragedy so great, it has sometimes seemed to me, as that of some crime committed by a good man who, through one unwatched impulse or another, finds himself betrayed into a deed at variance with the traditions of his whole life. For if, as we believe, no soul so degraded exists as to be without a germ of better things; so there lives no human soul, we may be sure, without some hidden possibility

for perhaps unthought-of evil. I can, I say, conceive of few things more tragic than such evil suddenly springing up in a life that has hitherto fulfilled its ambition of kindly deeds and honest days, and through one moment's action, laying waste the years that have been and those that are yet to be.

In the following story I tell how such a fate befell a good and simple-hearted man, and in what manner he met it.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

The beginning of my story dates from some seventy years back, from that great and tragic day, when the tide of battle ebbing from the plains of Waterloo, left them strewn with dark forms prostrate beneath the streaming heavens, the darkening sky. One can fancy what yearning thoughts were busy then in many a rough fellow's breast, what thick-coming fancies, confused by pain and the horrors of the field, were pictured on the

evening air. To one at least among them, Roger Bligh, a big, rough-hewn man who lay there dying in the twilight, there rose a vision of a little village among hills, where man and boy he had lived for thirty years; of an old farmhouse too above, and wicket-gate, and his little fair-haired daughter Catherine waiting to run out and welcome her father home from the wars. Then he roused himself from the faintness of mortal agony and swift-approaching death, and turned with a groan to an old friend and comrade, Caleb Field, who was lying with a shattered arm at his side.

'Are you there, Caleb?' he said. 'I'm done for, my boy; I'm a dead man. I shall never see the old place again. Be good to the little 'un, if ever you get back —there's nobody else to be good to her.'

'I will, Roger,' said the other, faintly. 'So help me God, I will.'

'I've nothing to leave her, not a farthing,' Roger went on, in his hoarse, gasping utterance. 'It don't matter—she'll be a rich woman, you know, some day, when her grandmother dies; but the old woman's the very devil to her now, I know she is—— Damn the Frenchman's bullet, it's done for me; and yet I swear I never once thought o' dying, or I'd not have left her, maybe. Be good to her, lad; she's your god-daughter, you know.'

'I will, Roger, if I live—as if she were my own,' Caleb said again.

'And tell the parson I forgive him—you know—his ill-turn in setting my wife at me—she were sorry for it, poor soul, before she died . . . and tell Tom Raikes I forgive him too . . . he'll laugh, I'll take my oath, when he hears of it, but I don't mind that now; I'll forgive him . . . God'll forgive me, perhaps, and take care

of the little 'un—Where's your hand, lad? I'm going——'

'The Lord ha' mercy on your soul,' said Caleb, solemnly.

He raised himself by the help of his unwounded arm, dragged himself painfully forward, and lifted his comrade's head upon his breast. So the two were found lying together. Roger was buried on the field where he lay; but Caleb was carried to a hospital, where, recovering presently from his wounds, he learned that peace was restored and that he was free to return to England.

When Caleb Field, the bearer of his comrade's dying charge and dying messages, returned one fine autumn day, to his native village of Haysted, he found all his little village world turned out to meet him. Scarcely a year had passed since he went away, for it was no love of soldiering

that had driven him to be a soldier, but the desire to join his friend, Roger Bligh; but the year, broadly speaking, had been spent in fighting Buonaparte, and not a soul in Haysted but wished to glorify the man who had seen the field of Waterloo. It was Waterloo, indeed, that they desired to honour in the person of their hero, rather than the man himself, for Caleb had never been popular with his neighbours. One of the shyest of mortals, with dreamy ways, and queer, diffident manners, he had held aloof always from the social life of the village; and as he passed along now with bent head, his knapsack on his back, his arm still in a sling, he hardly responded to the greetings that met him on every side; intent only, as it seemed, to gain the refuge of his little house at the end of the short street. The villagers commented good-humouredly enough on him as he walked along. He might be a

hero, but he was among his own country-people, and no prophet.

'Have you never a word of English left, old Caleb?' said one of them, a woman, standing at her door; 'why, you've fewer words than before ever you went away; and yet they say that in foreign parts they've never done chattering by day nor night.'

'He looks ill, poor soul,' said another, standing by, 'he's had a deal to bear, maybe; and he'll be grieving over the death of that ne'er-do-weel, Roger Bligh. He's thinking, like enough, that he went off to find him, and that now he's come back without him.'

'And a good riddance, too,' said her companion; 'my man's as steady again since that Bligh went away. It passes me now that a good, honest, pious man like Caleb Field, if he is a bit queer and in his dreams, should ha' taken up with the likes of Roger Bligh. Caleb'll be

pleased, though, when he hears there's a talk o' making him clerk. He's fit to be parson, is Caleb, let alone clerk, if he had but the learning for it; and he's a rare 'un at reading and writing as it is. See, there's his sister's son, Will Franklin; he'll stop and speak to him, if he'll speak to no one else. He's fonder o' that lad nor his own father is, I take it.'

A curly-headed boy of about ten years old had rushed headlong and breathless up the street.

'Hi, uncle,' he shouted, 'here you are; what fun to have you back again. Now we shall hear all about the fighting. Oh! I wish the war'd lasted till I could go for a soldier too.'

Caleb stopped short, as the woman foresaw, with a startled look at first, then with a smile as he saw the boy before him. He laid his hand on his head, raising his chin to look in his face.

'Why, Will lad, how you're grown,' he said; 'we shall have you a man soon, though there'll be no wars then, I hope, for you to fight in. How's father, lad?'

'He's bad with the rheumatism; and I go to the grammar-school now, uncle; but I come home every Saturday to Monday, and I've a holiday besides to-day, because you were coming. And father said he thought he'd make it up with you now you'd been to fight Buonaparte, and he hoped you'd go to see him. Have you got a medal, uncle?'

'Nay, lad,' said Caleb, 'if father's no better will than that to make it up wi' me, we'll just remain as we are. But you'll come and see me o' Sundays, Will, and we'll have Cathy. You've not forgotten Cathy?'

'I should think not,' shouted the boy; 'Cathy's a real good 'un. She's no good

now, though; she's away up at the Hill Farm, and they say her grandmother beats her. I'm glad I'm not Cathy to live with an old woman like that. Good-bye, uncle; I can't stop now, I'm going to the river; but I'll come soon and hear about the fighting.'

'Stay, Will,' said Caleb, laying a hand on his arm as the boy was rushing off again, 'what's that about Cathy? Who says her grandmother beats her?'

'Oh! everyone,' cried the boy; 'she's an old witch, I believe; she'll carry Cathy off some day on a broomstick.'

He darted off. Caleb stood still for a moment looking after him; then, shaking his head, he opened the door of his own cottage, in front of which he was standing, and went in.

He entered the front room, parlour and kitchen in one, and looked about him, as one looks who, after an absence that has

changed his whole life, finds his surroundings unchanged. All his life, until he had gone to fight Buonaparte, Caleb had lived in that house. He had lost his mother in childhood, his father some ten years later; and Caleb, always a dreamy and a somewhat melancholy man, had lived alone; not ill-content, for he liked his work, but cheered chiefly in his lonely life by intercourse with his friend Roger Bligh. His friend was gone now; and he had come back alone, to a life empty of its chief joy, with a shattered arm and enfeebled health. He unbuckled his knapsack, and laying it aside, sat down in an armchair by the fireless hearth; the sunshine fell across the empty grate, and it looked dreary. Some kindly woman neighbour had been in to tidy up the house, and had set out a homely noon-day meal; but Caleb hardly noticed it was there. He sat down, and leaning his head on his hand,

remained gazing through the window at the little red-roofed house across the street, where Roger Bligh had lived with his little daughter Catherine. It was in other hands now; a woman was hanging out clothes over the quickset hedge in front; half-a-dozen children were swarming in and out. Caleb dropped his head with a groan; at that moment he wished he were lying at rest beside his friend on the field of Waterloo.

A knock came at the door; and before he could open it, the Vicar of the parish walked in, a tall, portly man, kindly and well-meaning, but a trifle formal.

'Well, Caleb,' he said, shaking hands with him and seating himself in the arm-chair from which Caleb had risen—'But sit down, sit down,' he interrupted himself to say, as Caleb remained awkwardly standing and leaning against the table, 'you look shaken by your journey and by your

wound too, I daresay—Well, I have come to welcome you back. We are proud of you, Caleb; we are all proud of you.'

'You're very good to say so, sir,' said Caleb, bashfully, 'and I'm honoured, I'm sure, by your visit.'

'Not at all, Caleb; it is a pleasure that I promised myself as soon as I heard that your return was expected. You must come up to the vicarage, and tell my wife all that you have been seeing and doing. She is specially anxious to know whether you really saw Buonaparte himself. I tell her it's not likely, but she'll not be satisfied without hearing all you have to tell. Yes, yes, Caleb, you'll have a deal to tell us all. And you'll be welcome wherever you go. I disapproved at the time, as you are aware, of your enlisting; you had your own work here, and went, as I understood it, to put yourself in the way of needless temptation by joining that very reckless and unsteady

fellow you had chosen for a friend. But a man who has been wounded in the service of his country deserves all honour. We shall all welcome you back, Caleb.'

Caleb did not immediately answer. He sat upright on the edge of his chair, his wounded arm resting on the table beside him.

'Well,' he said slowly, at last, 'there's one that died for his country, who deserves more honour than I do. Roger died at my side, sir, on the battle-field; and almost his last words, if you'll excuse me, sir, was to bid me tell you he forgave you. Maybe he was not altogether in his collected mind at the time, to send such a message; for he was going fast, poor fellow. But those, sir, were his words; and the words of a dying man I take to be sacred.'

'Well, well,' said the Vicar, choking a little, 'he meant well, no doubt, Caleb;

and, as you say, he died for his country; we will hope that he is now—ahem—in a better world. I cannot say I regret his absence from the village; certainly not; but I am sorry for his little girl. They say her grandmother treats her unkindly; they even say that she beats her.'

'Who says it, sir?' said Caleb, quickly.

'Popular report, Caleb; it may or may not be true. I have no dealings of any kind with Mrs. Wright, as you know; nor am I likely to have; so I can do nothing for the child. But I am sorry for the little thing; she was very fond of her father, I know, and might have been a good influence in his life as time went on.' The Vicar rose. 'Well, I must be going, Caleb; I only looked in for a minute in passing; but I must not forget the most important thing I had to say. You'll hardly be able to return to your carpentering at present, I sup-

pose? It is your left arm, happily, that is injured; but I suppose it rather disables you, eh?'

Caleb looked down at his arm.

'I shall never work at my trade again,' he said, 'unless it be the lighter kinds by-and-by, when I'm a bit stronger. Some light kinds o' cabinet-work I might be able to manage.'

'And that you are skilful at, as I am aware,' said the Vicar. 'Well, what I had to say, is this. Old Peter Symes, the clerk, died not long ago, and we've kept the place open, thinking you might like the offer of it.'

A flush rose to Caleb's pale face.

'I'd accept it, and thankfully,' he said. 'I shall have my pension, and be able to keep myself, one way or another; no fear. But it's a sort o' business I've a fancy for; and thank you, sir, for thinking of me.'

'Well, then, we'll consider that as settled,' said the Vicar; 'and now, Caleb, I hope you will see a little more of your neighbours than formerly. It's a pity for a man to hold aloof from his kind, as I've often told you. By-the-by, I saw your little nephew, Will Franklin, in the village to-day; what a fine lad he's growing. You're not on terms, I think, with his father, Caleb? That's a pity now, you know.'

'Well, sir,' said Caleb, with more decision of manner than he had yet shown, 'Franklin chose to quarrel with me at the time of his wife's, my sister's, death; and it's not for me to make advances till he chooses to see he were in the wrong. But he does well by the boy; he's giving him a good eddication, though he's only a small tenant-farmer himself, and he never hinders the lad from coming to see me. I'm glad o' that, for I'm fonder o' that boy, sir, than I could say.'

'Well, Caleb, he'll be an interest to you, no doubt,' said the Vicar, kindly. 'And now, come up to the vicarage this evening, will you? My wife will be glad to see you, as I have said; and we can talk over the clerk's business afterwards.'

He went away. Caleb sat down again; but he did not again fall into despondent musings. The Vicar's visit had roused him. In a minute he rose and cut himself a slice of bread and bacon; then taking his stick, started on his way to the Hill Farm.

CHAPTER II.

A BYE-WAY near Caleb's cottage conducted between hedges and across fields to a point on the high-road not far removed from the steep lane that led upwards from the valley to the Hill Farm. He chose it now, in preference to again running the gauntlet of the village street. Not that he wished to be ungracious; he was grateful, on the contrary, to his neighbours for their kindly feeling; simply it was that now, as throughout his life, to hold aloof from his kind, as the Vicar termed it, was Caleb's first instinctive care.

Caleb Field was at this time between four and five-and-thirty, a thin man, tall

and stooping, with a lean, brown face, dreamy eyes, and a very sweet and willing smile. His dreaminess it was, perhaps, that most impressed itself on those about him, that tended most of all to make him unpopular. A frank and impenetrable stupidity could be understood; but a dreaminess that might conceal anything, could naturally only be regarded with mistrust. Caleb was in fact one of those men who, with perfect simplicity of nature, have certain qualities of mind and imagination which, when unexplained by education, are apt to make them a puzzle to themselves and to those about them. Caleb had had little education apart from his trade; he could read and write, but books were dear in those days and hard to come by for men in his rank of life. Nor in any case, perhaps, would it have occurred to him to moralize on his own character. The small amount of self-conscious-

ness which he possessed only produced a perplexed recognition that he was in some way different from his neighbours, a fact causing him no little pain in so far as it raised a barrier between him and them—a barrier he vainly tried to remove by such unobtrusive acts of kindness as came in his way.

There is always a touch of pathos about the contradictions of a mind whose natural instincts are stronger than the power of reasoning upon them, especially when a man is thereby led to such wisdom as appears folly to his fellow-men. Caleb's instincts had led him into deeds with which reason had apparently little to do. They had led him, for instance, to bestow time and labour in giving a better finish to his work than was accounted needful by other men. They had made him love and admire the strong and reckless Roger Bligh more than any man on earth, so that,

when Roger enlisted in one of his wild moods, Caleb also turned restless, and knew no content till he went to fight at his friend's side. Caleb again had a simple piety, which found a sufficient outlet in regular church-going and devout attention to the parson's sermons. But when Roger had his famous quarrel with the Vicar for interfering in his domestic concerns, a wider sympathy, for which he could have found no name, made Caleb side with his friend.

'The parson's a good man,' he said, speaking with the energy and decision that came to him when he was strongly moved, 'and knows where to find a power of fine words o' Sunday, but he should ha' let Roger be; or, if he had anything to say, he should ha' spoken out like a man, and not have set his wife, poor fool, upon him.'

Such was Caleb Field before he left his

native village, popular at once and unpopular—half-liked for his gentle kindly temper, half-mistrusted for his diffidence and queer ways; and such, with little change beyond the loss and trouble brought to him by the past year, was Caleb Field that autumn day as he made his way to the Hill Farm to visit his comrade's orphan daughter Catherine.

Little Catherine, the only descendant of a yeoman family that for generations had farmed its own acres, would be, as her father had said, a rich woman one day. At present she was only a lonely child living with her grandmother, Mrs. Wright, a vigorous, hard-featured old woman, who rode to markets and fairs to drive her own hard bargains, quarrelled with her neighbours, never went to church, but lived, as she was presently to die, an independent old heathen. She never forgave her daughter's marriage with Roger Bligh;

she took no notice of her daughter's death, which occurred a year or two after Catherine was born ; and Catherine, living in the village with her father, never even saw her grandmother in her infancy. It was only when her father enlisted and the child was left alone, that her grandmother, suddenly descending one day, bore her off to the Hill Farm that in the years to come would be Catherine's own.

The Hill Farm was an old-fashioned, deep-roofed house standing among barns and ricks and hay-stacks at the top of a steep and bushy lane that opened on a far-reaching stretch of heathery moorland. Below, a green and fertile land sloped downwards to the valley ; cows fed in deep pastures, grass ripened, seed was sown, the harvest was gathered in the wide-spreading fields and meadows that would one day belong to Catherine Bligh ; but immediately behind the farm-house

lay undulating tracts of heath where sheep and cow-bells tinkled among gorse and bracken, and sweeping breezes brought a fresher breath than the sheltered valley knew. A gate to stay straying cattle crossed the top of the lane; immediately beyond, a paling with a smaller gate, where a clump of red-stemmed fir-trees made a black shade, shut in the open space in front of the farm-house itself. Well as Caleb knew the place by sight, he had never yet been within that gate. Catherine's grandmother cultivated no acquaintance with her neighbours; least of all with her reprobate son-in-law's friend. But to-day he made his way up to the house-door, and was admitted without difficulty by the woman-servant who came to open it.

'Mistress is gone to market,' she said; 'she won't be home till nightfall. But if it's Cathy you're wanting, she's at home.

She's always at home, is Cathy; she sits and mopes from morn till night, for all mistress can say to her. Mistress scolds her above a bit—too much, maybe; but it ain't natural, not in a child of her age. I took her doll to her just now; she used to be fond of her doll, but she took no notice one way or another.'

The woman had opened the door into the kitchen as she spoke. It was a large, low-beamed room, running almost from end to end of the house. A lattice looked out upon a grass-plot and cherry-tree in front, and the long slope of a barn; at the back a door opened into a passage leading to the dairy. The October sun shone in, and a few embers only, glowed under the great black pot hung in the depths of the chimney. Beside them on the raised brick hearth crouched a fair-haired child of eight years old, half-sitting, half-kneeling, her elbow resting on a

wooden chair set in the chimney-corner, her cheek leaning on her hand. The neglected doll lay on its face behind her; she was not crying, she was not doing anything, only listlessly drawing the fingers of one hand backwards on the dusty bricks. Her back was turned to the room, and she did not move at the noise made by Caleb in entering, nor seem to notice him till he spoke.

'Why, Cathy,' he said, going up to her, 'you've never forgotten your old godfather, have you? Why, it's not a year hardly since we saw each other every day, and a year's too soon to forget.'

Catherine looked round, and got up slowly. She came to where Caleb stood, and putting her hand into his, looked at him with wide-open eyes.

'I've not forgotten,' she said.

'Well, I've come to look after you a bit, Cathy,' Caleb went on. 'That's the

last thing your father said before he died, that I were to be good to you. You'll like to hear about father, and all we did together, Cathy?'

Catherine turned away her head, and pressed her hands together.

'It's no good,' she said; 'father's dead. I don't care now.'

Caleb was silent for a moment, baffled by this quiet child-despair.

'But he remembered you, Cathy,' he said at last. ''Twas the last thing almost he said before he died; "Be good to the little 'un," he said; and he'd like for you to know all he did. And he bought something for you in one o' those foreign towns we went to, a toy like what the children there play with. He thought you'd like it. I've got it down at my house now. Would you care to come down with me, Cathy, and fetch it?'

'Yes,' said the child, 'I'd like that. I

haven't been to the village since father went away.'

'Then come,' said Caleb, 'you shall have your supper with me to-night, and we'll get a little cake at the shop, like we used to do, and you shall toast it. You'll like that, Cathy?'

She put her hand into his for answer; and in a few minutes the two were walking down the hill together.

Caleb was not a man to care greatly for the companionship of children. Always silent and diffident, he was especially so in their society, feeling too uncertain about the thoughts and wishes busy in their small minds to know how to talk to them. His kindly purpose of being good to Cathy had helped him through their interview at the Hill Farm; but he said little during their walk, and when he had his little guest in his own room at home, he stood looking at her

in silent embarrassment, smiling, indeed, to show his good-will, but lost for the moment as to what should be done next. Catherine relieved him by taking matters into her own hands. She walked straight to the lattice-window that jutted out upon the street, and kneeling on the window-seat with her arms resting on the sill, remained fixed in contemplation of her old home just opposite. Caleb, willing to leave her undisturbed, lighted the fire, and himself toasted the cake, not speaking again until supper was ready.

'Come, Cathy,' he said then, 'here's supper ready; and see, here's your little knife and fork, just like you used to have when you came here with father.'

She came up to the table, and stood looking at it for a minute in silence. Then, going up to her godfather, she put her hand in his again, and laid her cheek against his arm.

'I'd like to stay here always,' she said.

'Why, would you, Cathy?' said Caleb. 'Ain't you happy up at the Hill Farm? Is grandmother not good to you?'

The child made no direct reply. 'I d like to stay here,' was all she said.

Caleb stood silent and pondering for a while.

'Well, you shall then,' he said at last, 'you shan't go back to the Hill Farm any more, Cathy. There's a little room upstairs with a little bed in it as 'll just fit you. You shall stay here wi' me, and we'll have Will to come and play with you. You remember Will, Cathy?'

'Yes,' said the child, with brightening eyes, 'he used to break my dolls; but I'm older now, and I shan't mind. I hope Will 'll come soon.'

'Yes, yes, you shall stay wi' me,' said Caleb again. 'I'll make things straight with your grandmother. And Will shall

come. He goes to grammar-school now, he tells me, but we'll get his father to let him come o' Sundays, and perhaps of a Saturday sometimes.'

'There is Will,' said Catherine, suddenly.

A boy ran past the window and the next moment burst into the room. 'Good-bye, uncle, I'll come again soon,' he cried. 'Hulloa, why, here's Cathy; however did you get here, Cathy? I thought your grandmother kept you tied up to her broomstick.'

'Hush, boy,' said Caleb, 'Cathy's come to live wi' me now, and mind you get father to let you come of a Sunday, my lad, and then you'll see her.'

'That'll be fun,' said the boy, 'if Cathy won't be a ninny and cry over her dolls. You don't care about dolls now, do you, Cathy?'

'Yes, I do,' said Catherine, with decision,

'but I'll put 'em away on Sunday, Will, if you don't like them.'

'Like 'em!' said Will, with measureless contempt. 'We'll go nutting, Cathy; see if you don't like that better than a fool of a doll. Do you know where the best nuts grow? At the top of your grandmother's far field. We'll peep and get 'em when she's not looking, and run if she comes near. That'll be the fun of it.'

That same evening Caleb went again to the Hill Farm and confronted Mrs. Wright. What passed between them, no one ever knew, but Caleb carried his point. He carried his point, for he could act with both energy and determination when the occasion demanded it. In an hour he returned with a bundle of Catherine's things, and that night the stars shone down on a peaceful home in the village street. Catherine slept for the first time in the little chamber under her

godfather's roof that was to be her own for the next thirteen years; and for Caleb, with the close of his old life in the death of his friend, a new life was begun through his friend's child.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THIRTEEN years later Caleb Field awoke early one fine morning in June, when the birds were beginning to stir and twitter in the clear red dawn and the grass was still grey with dew, to feel that not the sun, but darkness was about to rise upon his world. On that day Catherine was to leave him, and go to her own home at the Hill Farm.

Caleb still lived in his little house on the village street, though through choice rather than necessity. He was a well-to-do man

in these days, so far as money was concerned. For his injured arm having with time recovered strength and power sufficient to enable him to apply himself to such lighter kinds of cabinet work as had amused his leisure hours when he was a journeyman carpenter, he presently acquired with practice so much skill both in design and execution that his name became known in the country round, and he had as many commissions as he could undertake. He was a well-to-do man now, and could have lived in a bigger house had he cared to do so. But a snail that has crawled to the top of a wall would as soon think of ordering a new shell to adorn its new position, as Caleb of changing the house that had sheltered him all his life. He was one of those men for whom memories tapestry walls and furniture much more effectually than the upholsterer's art. He loved

his old home; his father and mother had lived and died there; and when he thought about death at all, he meant to die there also.

Caleb lived on then, just as he had done during the previous thirty or forty years. His habits had changed, indeed, a little to meet his changed circumstances; he was the parish clerk now; he was his own master; he had Catherine; but they had changed only to become confirmed. He was still much the same stooping, dreamy, diffident man he had been in youth; only youth was gone from him, and was growing up before his eyes instead. Caleb was ageing; but at his side in all these years had been the springing life of Catherine.

In the first days after her arrival, Caleb had still felt a certain shyness towards the little companion who had unexpectedly come into his life. But his kindly nature soon drew him more frankly

towards one so young and so dependent upon him, and before long a sort of tender friendship grew up between the man and the child. They never had a great deal to say to each other. Catherine was a silent, practical child, of loving ways but few words; she rarely laughed; she had no bubbling flow of childish chatter, or Caleb had no power to call it forth. Every day she went to school, where she learnt reading, writing, and sums; but these serious studies had little interest for her. Catherine's tastes were all practical; knitting, and sewing, and cooking, and a maternal care of her godfather. She soon found out that Caleb needed her care. In those early months after his return from Waterloo, he might often have been seen sitting for hours smoking his pipe with an air of dejection as he thought of his lost friend and his loss of active power. But little Catherine's return

from school never failed to rouse him, to stir him from despondency to the half-anxious, half-pathetic solicitude with which, conscious chiefly of his own awkwardness and his own good-will, he strove to take her father's place; till, gradually and naturally, he, in his turn, began to lean on the fresh energies of the growing child, and Catherine's will and Catherine's care became law to the little household.

'Godfather, there's your pipe gone out again,' she would say, coming in with her books and satchel, 'give it me and I'll fill it for you. And I'm going to boil the kettle and make the porridge; I can, godfather, quite well, better than you can. And if you'll sit still I'll warm your old shoes for you, too. Is your arm aching much this evening, godfather?'

Such had been Catherine's childhood. When she was about fifteen her grandmother died, and it was then proposed to

take the girl from Caleb's care and place her at school in the nearest town, some twelve miles off. But Catherine refused to go. She did not like schooling, she loved Haysted; she would not leave her godfather; she would study farming, but she cared for no other studies. There was about Catherine a certain power that already made itself felt. She was never unreasonable; she did not come to decisions quickly, but she always knew exactly what she wished and why she wished it; and as her wishes never soared to the unattainable and the illimitable, there was nothing to confuse the clear judgment she brought to bear upon them.

Catherine remained then with her godfather, and the Hill Farm was let for a term of years. But her tenant dying shortly before she came of age, she decided herself to go and live at the farm, in company with old Mrs. Matthews, the late

tenant's widow. Catherine came of a vigorous stock, and saw no reason why, with the help of her grandmother's bailiff, she should not farm her own lands and look after her own property; she had, in fact, in these last months, spent more of her time at the farm than in the village, learning at once and superintending the large business of the farm life. As for Caleb, he had always known that his god-daughter must one day leave him; he knew that it was fitting she should take her place in her own home, nor would he once listen to her entreaty that he would go and live with her. But not the less he awoke on that June morning to feel that darkness had fallen on him and his house, to a sense that his life was broken as it never had been broken before; no, not even on that other June day when his friend died beside him on the field of Waterloo.

The sun had long been up when he rose

at last, reluctantly, as though loth to take on him the weight of the heavy day. He went downstairs to the little sitting-room. Catherine was there already, moving about, making the porridge, setting the breakfast things as usual. Caleb sat down and watched her, thinking of the day—it seemed but the other day—that she had laid her cheek against his arm, and said she would stay with him. He sat watching her; yes, she was his little lass again and all the past years were to come.

Catherine set down the porridge dish and came and stood in front of him. There were tears in her eyes.

'Godfather,' she said, 'I wish I could stay with you, I wish I could. I shall never be so happy again as I've been here.'

'Nay, my lass,' said Caleb, rousing himself and trying to smile, 'you've stayed here over long, most folk would say, a

grand rich lady as you might be, and one who holds her head so high. Put on thy best gown to-day, lass, that all the folk may see how fine you can look.'

'Why, godfather, I never care about looking fine,' said Catherine, smiling a little, 'and my best gowns and my worst are much alike, for that matter. You know I don't care about fine gowns.'

'And we shall see each other,' Caleb went on, slowly rubbing the palms of his hands together, 'we shall be none so far apart but we shall see each other, Cathy.'

'Why, yes,' said Catherine, 'you'll come and see me, godfather, every minute you have the time. And there's Sundays; you've promised always to walk to church with me, you know, and spend the day afterwards at the farm. You won't forget that.'

'Ay, ay, my lass, we'll spend our Sun-

days together, please God,' said Caleb. But he looked drearily before him into the room, as he sat with his chin resting on his hands as though it were vacant already to his imagination.

'And, Will,' said Catherine, hesitating a little, 'Will's always spent his Sundays with us, except the years he was away; he'd miss it if the custom was broken now. He must come to the Hill Farm too.'

'Ay, ay,' said Caleb again, 'Will shall come too. I should miss the lad anyhow, if I didn't see him once a week. For all he was away nearly three years, and has only been back a month, it seems only natural to have him about again. And now, lass, give me the porridge and go put on thy best gown.'

An hour or so later the door of Caleb's house closed behind Catherine as she started with her godfather to walk up to

the Hill Farm. A few hours later again, she stood bidding him farewell at the gate at the top of the lane. There had been a dinner given at the farm in honour of Catherine's coming of age; the guests were still there, the sound of voices and laughter came through the open windows; but Caleb, who had sat silent throughout the meal, had escaped as soon as it was over.

'I'm tired,' he had said to Catherine; 'I'm none o' this sort, as you know, Cathy —I'm best away and alone.'

Catherine made no remonstrance with her godfather, but she walked with him to the gate, and stood there holding his hand, as though reluctant to let him go.

'Come soon and see me, godfather,' she said; 'come to-morrow. I shall be alone to-morrow, and there'll be no one to disturb you.'

'Nay, my lass, not to-morrow; I've work

to do, as you know,' said Caleb, 'and you and me's apart now, Cathy; it's best we should know it. Sunday I'll come and welcome, and the days'll go; no fear.'

So they parted. Catherine returned to her guests, whilst Caleb went his lonely way with bent head, down the lane to the valley.

He went his way, but not immediately to his own home. He had work waiting for him; but his day had been broken into, and he felt too unsettled, too forlorn to return at once to his workshop and his tools. He made a long round by fields and lanes and paths, to a little grassy meadow shut in by bushy hedges, and ditched on two sides by a running stream overhung here and there by faintly odorous clusters of dog-roses. At one point, where the cows had trodden down a drinking-place for themselves, and where stout hemlocks and cuckoo-pint stood thick

among the flowering June grass, was an old oak-tree where, some five-and-twenty years before, Caleb, with a laughing village lass at his elbow, had carved his own and the girl's initials entwined with a true lover's knot. Poor Caleb! here had been the romance of his early life, a common-place romance enough, yet bitter as ever a shy youth of twenty suffered and lived through —a saucy, black-eyed wench who first lured on, then turned her back on the awkward lad, and married a rich farmer instead. Years ago she had died; but Caleb, broken-hearted at the time, had kept a tender place for her in his heart ever since. And yet from that day to this he had never revisited the spot that held his closest memories. What brought him here now? His dreamy eyes sought the initials he had cut, as though expecting to see them still; but they had long since disappeared. Caleb stood leaning on his stick, his me-

mory gone back into the past, his mind entangled between past and present, the years before he had known Catherine—and now Catherine was gone again—the years of his youth and the years of his age, all mingled and confused. What did it matter? since all alike was sadness and loneliness. He shook his head at last and turned away.

It was dark when he reached home and entered his empty room. He struck a light. All was in order, and his supper laid in readiness on the table; for a girl in the village came in and out to do the house-work. Caleb sat down heavily in his arm-chair; he was tired with his walk, tired with the long day, too tired almost to think. He sat down, and drawing the candle near him, took up his pipe that lay on a ledge at his elbow, and prepared to light it. The bowl was empty; for the first time in many years his hand sought

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his pipe, to find it unfilled. Caleb laid it down again absently, and leaning back in his chair, sat sunk in vague and weary thought. In a few minutes he reached out his hand, and took up the pipe again; it was still empty. Caleb's eyes wandered round the room; his head fell on his breast. Yes, his life was broken; and courage seemed gone, and strength and power to mend it.

CHAPTER II.

At one-and-twenty Catherine Bligh was a tall, rather large, finely-moulded young woman, with a round fair-complexioned face, an abundance of yellow hair, and grey eyes, whose direct glance expressed at once clearness of mental vision and a good and straightforward simplicity. Catherine was not a beauty; but there was in her aspect a fresh comeliness that to those who loved her was better than beauty; and no pleasanter sight could have been seen in Haysted than herself, as she walked to church with her godfather on the Sunday following her departure to the Hill Farm. Catherine's

dress was simple almost to plainness; it corresponded with her mind, and rejected the frills and ribbons and vanities dear to most girls of her age. A grey home-spun gown, a straw hat with a knot of blue ribbon under her shining plaits, this was her attire now; her only adornment a gold watch at her side, and a bunch of June roses in front of her dress. But Catherine's head was erect, and she walked with dignity and ease. In manner she was somewhat reserved always, talking little, seldom smiling, never lingering to gossip; and the villagers among whom she had been brought up, said she held herself high, and thought too much of her money.

Catherine, in fact, was by no means indifferent to the wealth and position with which fate had endowed her. She liked the heaped-up abundance of the old farm, where she now moved as mis-

tress; the big kitchen, where the ruddy glow, emblem of hospitality, never died upon the wide hearth; the well-filled barns and presses, the stores of fine-woven linen, linen spun and woven and fashioned by grandmothers and great-grandmothers for generations past; and outside the far-spreading fields and pastures, the golden ricks, the horses and cattle, the fruitful orchards, even the neglected garden of herbs and straggling briars—she liked them all; but less through the consciousness of wealth and position that they conveyed than through a sense of the width and graciousness of this sweet plenty that the heavens above and the earth beneath combined to prepare for her day by day, through the knowledge that here was enough and to spare for all, for those of her own household and for the poor, who need never be turned from her gates.

To Catherine, in the midst of her wealth, there could be, it seemed, no sweeter or nobler lot in life than to stand with full hands to supply those that were empty, to give food to the hungry, garments to the naked. She loved this large power of giving to all around her; she loved herself to scatter handsful of grain to the fowls, to pull down the cut grass for the cows, to feed the young calves with new milk. Hers was the golden life, the large primitive life of the golden age; and something strong and primitive in her nature sprang to meet it. For the hour—such hours are brief—she lived, without knowing it, in Arcadia. Of her money she thought little; of her power of using it a good deal; of what people said, nothing at all. She inherited her grandmother's independent spirit, and was ready to stand alone, indifferent to the popular voice and opinion.

This was the Catherine known to all the village and the country round. Another Catherine there was, who on that same Sunday evening might have been seen wandering in the little weed-grown garden behind the old farmhouse. It was a very neglected garden of herbs, and fruit-trees, and flowers, and full of charm, as such gardens are to those who take delight in Nature's wilful escapes from decorum. Catherine, indeed, who loved a large and fruitful order, meant to have it duly pruned in time and set to rights; but in these first days at the Hill Farm she also found a charm she could not have defined in the spot just as it was. Yes, a charm lay for her in its very neglect. Catherine had more passion than sentiment in her nature; and yet it was the sentiment of the place that addressed her now, its sweet liberty of growth, its wayward yet persistent choice of sunshine and

free air. It harmonised with a new spirit that had stirred within her in these last few weeks, a spirit that overpassed her wonted range of thought, to write for her, who had never read a verse outside her Psalter, the fresh poetry of life. Ah, happy days, when all Nature is a poem that clerk and dunce can read alike, since each alike is wise through the wisdom of the divine eternal folly.

A man's footstep trod the path outside —not Caleb's slow step, but a firm, youthful tread; the little wicket leading into the garden clicked and opened. Catherine moved from where she was standing, and came forward a few steps to meet the newcomer, smoothing down her hair as she did so.

'Is that you, Will?' she said, in a voice that had a very sweet accent in it. 'I can't see you hardly in the dark. I just came out to cut a lettuce for supper.'

The young fellow laughed.

'In the dark?' he said. 'Wait a minute, and I'll fetch a lantern.'

'It's no matter, and the moon'll be up in a minute,' Catherine answered; but the young man was gone. In a few minutes he returned, bearing a lantern, whence a long line of light fell with his progress, across the strange contortions of the old apple-trees, making them look, as they started out of the surrounding darkness, like denizens of some enchanted wood. It flashed, as he approached, on Catherine with her yellow hair and grey dress, as she stood leaning against a gnarled and moss-grown trunk, a bower of green leaves above her head. Will went up to her, holding the lantern high, so that the light fell between them, illuminating each youthful face; hers fair, colouring a little in the sudden blaze; his handsome, sunburnt, with brown curly locks carelessly tossed back from his fore-

head. The light fell between them, and they both laughed outright. Catherine, who rarely laughed, was the first to recover herself.

'Will,' she said, 'what are you laughing at? I am sure I don't know.'

'I'm laughing——' he began; but, as he spoke, his eyes met Catherine's and he broke off. For the space of a second they stood, he looking down at her, her eyes widening a little like a child's, as they met his gaze; then with a sudden flush she moved away abruptly out of the light into the encircling darkness. Will did not speak; but in a moment he followed her, and setting the lantern on the ground, began to help her cut the salad.

Will Franklin was grown into a fine manly young fellow who wore his rough farmer's coat, his heavy boots and gaiters, with an air which implied that if in these matters he did not follow the latest

fashion, it was from no want of knowledge, but from a superiority to frivolous details. More than once, when he and Catherine had been seen together in the village, it had been remarked that they were a handsome couple, and that old Caleb Field knew what he was about in bringing together his rich god-daughter and his nephew. Caleb, who generally saw last what was just before his dreamy eyes, had no such thought, even remotely, in his mind. But he had lost none of his old affection for his nephew; he had missed him greatly during his absence from Haysted, and it was a delight to him to have his company again, as in old times, on Sunday afternoons. For Will had been away for nearly three years, studying various methods of farming in different parts of the country; and it was family trouble that had called him home now.

Old Franklin had been a prosperous

man in early life, and both affection and ambition had induced him to do well by his only son, giving him first a good education at a grammar-school, sending him then out into the world, as has been said, to study. But things of late had gone ill with the old man; failing health had come, and failing powers; crops were short, rent in arrears, and behind all, a squire and a squire's agent disposed to press hard. He recalled his son, to lend a helping hand and put in practice all the knowledge he had acquired of the latest improvements in agriculture. Will, who had, in fact, seen not a little of the world since he left home, was a very ambitious young fellow, determined to do well for himself in life; and he set to work with a will to settle matters at home. But he complained bitterly to his uncle that his father's old-fashioned notions stood constantly in the way of his plans for improving the farm.

'He tells me to do what I think best,' he said to Caleb, as they sat together at the Hill Farm that Sunday evening, 'and the next day I find that he has contradicted all my orders. If I complain, he tells me that mine are new-fangled notions that will never come to any good. He might as well have kept me at home, or let me stay away altogether, if all I've learnt is to go for nothing.'

Caleb pondered a while before answering.

'Well, lad, you must have patience,' he said at last, slowly, 'it's hard, maybe, for young and old to work together. When one's seen many a thing fail, and many a fine notion come to nought, it is hard to believe that the next one that turns up 'll set the world straight for once and all. But I daresay you're right, lad, in your ideas, for you've a clear head and a straight way of looking at things, so far

as I can judge. What is it you want to do? Tell me about these new notions o' yours.'

Will explained at length, warming with his subject as he went on; and Caleb, listening attentively, understood the general theories well enough, though he was too ignorant of farming to follow the details.

'Well, uncle, I wish I had you to work with instead of my father,' Will said at last. 'I might have a chance then.'

Caleb shook his head.

'Nor you wouldn't like that, neither, my lad,' he said, 'I've no head for business, Will, not outside my own work; and these last few days I'm thinking I've not much left for that either. You should talk to Catherine, lad, about your fine schemes. She, now, has a wonderful head for business.'

'Catherine has no need of my talking to her,' said Will, 'whatever she does,

prospers. Where is Catherine?' he added, looking round; and then, seeing she was no longer in the room, he had gone into the garden to look for her.

Caleb, seated in the deep chimney-corner, smoking a pipe filled for him by Catherine, had recovered more serenity than he had known since the day his god-daughter left him. Here at least was an hour free from the sadness that held him like a heavy dream in his empty home; here, seated by Catherine's hearth, with Catherine moving to and fro, he recognised himself again. Caleb was no longer a young man; and clear though his intelligence was when he roused his mind to bear upon any point, he had always had a confused way of looking at life that left him half the time with a half-realization only, even of matters that most closely touched himself. He felt without perceiving. But with Catherine at hand, perception was

easy enough. He turned to look at her now as, followed by Will, she entered the room and began moving about, intent on some household matter, smiling a little as she passed her godfather. In Catherine's presence, when she was at home with those she loved, there was something sweet, gracious, and benign. Will's eyes followed her wherever she went; Caleb watched her with a dreamy, half-melancholy look; only old Mrs. Matthews with her white cap and her white hair, dozed on in the chimney-corner, taking no heed.

'Come and sit down, Cathy,' said Caleb, at last. She came and seated herself on a low chair in front of the fire; and shading her eyes with one hand, laid the other on her godfather's knee. Caleb placed his thin brown nervous hand gently on hers, which was brown also, but firm and soft and flexible, as strong to support, tender to caress.

'You've a look of your father to-night, Cathy,' Caleb said, after a minute's pause; 'you're not like him, you take after your mother's family; but you've a look of him when you sit like that. You remember your father, Cathy?'

'Why, of course I remember him well, godfather,' said Catherine, 'and yet, whiles I forget him,' she added; 'his face, I mean. It seems to fade like, when I try to see it plain.'

'Ah! well, he remembered you; he often talked about you. I remember in particular one evening. We'd been on the march all day, up to our knees in mud, and soaked through and through; but your father only laughed at it, Cathy. He thought little o' mud and rain or other things that most men were fit to grumble at——'

Will here pushed back his chair with a movement of impatience. This sentence

was the beginning of an old, old story of Caleb's, one of his old stories of the war, from which, to Will's mind, all gloss of adventure and romance had been rubbed off years ago. Will had heard enough about the fighting by this time; he could not pretend that he cared to hear his uncle's stories again; on the contrary, he hardly concealed that they bored him to death. If Catherine had not been there, seated where he could watch the firelight on her hair and rounded cheek, he would have risen abruptly and said good-night. Will had a certain affection for his uncle, even a certain gratitude for many kindnesses shown to him by Caleb; but he had the want of generosity common in young people at once slightly defiant of their elders and quite certain of being about to do a great deal more in the world than has ever been done before. Will had an ardent, ambitious spirit, and certainly felt no great reverence for an

old uncle who had settled down quietly for life, content to be parish clerk, and to live in a little house in the village street. Why should he care much, one way or the other, for a dreamy, fast-ageing man?

For Caleb was, in fact, no longer young. An old man indeed he was not, since he was still two or three years under fifty; and yet the epithet, 'Old Caleb,' which his queer, secluded ways had gained him years ago, was felt now to befit his age. He had never altogether recovered his strength after Waterloo; his hair early turned white, the slight stoop of his tall figure became confirmed as he sat bending over his work for hours. He had begun to acquire, too, some of the habits of old age. He liked to sit each evening in his own chair and in his own corner, to rise and to go to bed at the same hour; he liked to work and to rest, each at its appointed time, to find each day repeating

itself with the monotony of a life from which little more can be hoped or expected.

Yes, he had begun to like all that, as old people like it. His routine, indeed, had been shattered, and he had been left to feel his way as best he could to a new condition of things. And yet, seated quietly now, with Catherine's hand on his knee, he felt at peace for the hour; nor, striving to resign himself to what fate had brought him, dreamed to what ends fate should lead him yet.

CHAPTER III.

Towards sunset on the following day, Caleb again made his way up to the Hill Farm, partly on business, partly to still a restlessness, a dull craving that had been on him all day, unsettling him in his work, making him long for the hour when he could lay his tools aside. He had not meant to go again to the farm until the following Sunday. He and Catherine were apart now, as he had told her; yes, they were apart. But throughout the hours that sense of loneliness, of worse than loneliness, of something missing at every turn, torn from his life to its irreparable loss, the sense

that had haunted him ever since Catherine passed from under his roof, grew upon him till it became intolerable. He would go to the Hill Farm. He had no expectation of seeing Catherine; she had told him the previous evening that she was to spend the day and sleep at the house of a friend at some little distance. But a message could be left with Mrs. Matthews; he could rest awhile in Catherine's house, nay, smoke a pipe perhaps, as he had done last evening on Catherine's hearth. His lass would not be there; but the room that was her home, where he had seen her last, would be less empty than the room that could never be her home again.

It was nearly dark by the time Caleb reached the farm. The door stood open; the maids were somewhere at the back, and without meeting anyone, he went in through the passage towards the

kitchen, used as a sitting-room by Catherine, more than her parlour. Some design for his work—for Caleb very frequently made his own designs—had been vexing his mind during his walk; and making his way into the low-beamed room, lighted fitfully by leaping flames, he walked straight up to the hearth, with the intention of finding a piece of charred wood, and making a rough sketch on the white-washed wall, as it was his habit to do at home.

He walked up to it, expecting to find Mrs. Matthews there. Summer and winter she spent a good part of her old years in dozing over the fire. But Mrs. Matthews was not there: in place of the wrinkled old woman, in her black gown and decent widow's cap, some one with long plaits of hair and rounded cheeks soft with the bloom of youth, sat sleeping in the arm-chair set on the raised brick hearth, sleeping

with hands loosely folded and head reclined, in an attitude of complete repose. A pair of steel shoe-buckles shone in the firelight below a dark-blue cotton skirt; but from behind, through a low western lattice, some last sunset gleams gilded the sleeper's fair hair, and were reflected back here and there from the depths of the dusky room. It was Catherine; but Caleb, who imagined her to be miles away, did not at once recognise her. Still half-entangled by his own thoughts, half-confused by the confused light in the dim room, he only saw as in some vision, a fair woman sleeping there on the hearth in the mysterious, mingled light of fire and sky.

He was still looking at her with a dawning consciousness that this was Catherine, but a Catherine whom he saw with new eyes that had never so seen her before, when she awoke and looked up smiling

a little as from some pleasant dream.

'It's you, godfather,' she said. 'I seemed to hear some one come in; but I must have been asleep, I believe. I've been out and about since dawn almost, and had sat down to rest for a minute. I must have gone off without knowing it.'

Her eyes, as she spoke, sought the darkness behind Caleb; but finding no one, she rose and crossed the kitchen to close the door he had left open. Caleb, meanwhile, made no answer. He stood watching Catherine with troubled eyes as she came back to the hearth, and first throwing on some light wood to make a blaze, raised her hands and began to adjust the long plaits loosened during her sleep. Catherine was used to her godfather's fits of silence, but the strange expression in his eyes as she turned and met them startled her.

'Why, godfather, what's the matter?' she said in sudden alarm. 'Are you ill? Has anything happened?'

She laid her hand on his arm as she spoke. Caleb started at her touch and moved away a few paces, passing his hand once or twice over his eyes, like a man who tries to free himself from some illusion in which he yet believes.

'No,' he said at last; 'I'm well enough, and there's nothing happened that I know of, Cathy.'

He seated himself slowly in the arm-chair. Catherine stood looking at him as he sat, with his hands spread out on his knees, his eyes fixed on the floor; then taking his pipe from his pocket, she began to fill it from a tobacco-pouch that hung by the high chimney-shelf. Suddenly Caleb looked up, a strange excitement in his eyes.

'Catherine——!' he cried; but checked

himself. 'Where's Mrs. Matthews?' he said hurriedly. 'I came to leave a message with her. I thought you were away, Cathy. How is it you're here? You were going to be away all night, you said; you told me so yesterday.'

'Why, so I was going,' said Catherine; 'and then Margaret sent word to put me off, and I'm to go on Wednesday instead. But if you want to see Mrs. Matthews, godfather, she's back in the dairy, helping Molly to finish up the butter for to-morrow. Shall I call her?'

'No—no; it's no matter for to-day,' said Caleb, 'another day'll do as well.'

He mechanically took the lighted pipe Catherine offered him, but he let it lie unheeded between his fingers whilst he sat as before, leaning forward a little, his eyes on the floor. Catherine stood and watched him in silence. In all his varying moods she had never before seen her god-

father like this. Suddenly he rose. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes at once dim and eager fixed themselves on her, yet not on her, one would have said, but on some vision beyond her.

So he stood for a moment; then gradually his look took a fuller consciousness.

'Good-night, Catherine,' he said, turning abruptly, 'I must go. I'll come back soon, but I must go now.'

Catherine stopped him as he began to move towards the door.

'Godfather,' she said, 'you're not well, I'm sure you're not. Stay here to supper and sleep. I can't bear for you to take that long walk home when you're not feeling well.'

'No, no, I'm well enough, and I must be going,' said Caleb, 'I can't stay now. I shall be better at home.' He moved again towards the door as he spoke, and Catherine followed him through the passage, out of

the house into the little front garden. The sunset light was almost gone; masses of cloud were slowly drifting up from the west, spreading over half the heavens; but the stars were beginning to shine in a clear grey sky behind the slender branches of a cherry-tree, and the night was mild and still. Catherine and her godfather stood together for a moment at the little garden wicket.

'Are you sure there's nothing wrong?' Catherine said again, 'you've heard no bad news, godfather? not of Will, nor of—of anyone?'

Caleb looked at her in some wonder.

'Of Will?' he repeated. 'What news should I have heard o' him? No, no, I've seen and heard nothing of Will since we walked back together last night.'

He took Catherine's hand in his, and stood gazing at her for a moment in the grey twilight. A brief tremor passed through

his frame; he let her hand drop, and without another word walked away into the darkness of the tree-shadowed lane.

CHAPTER IV.

Caleb Field walked home that evening through a world that one moment's experience had made a changed world for him. It was late when he reached his own house. His hearth was fireless, the window was set wide open towards the village street where a clear moonlight was now shining down, and lights were already beginning to kindle in some of the little upper windows set in the sloping red roofs. Caleb found a candle in the darkness, lighted it, and placed it on a long deal board fixed as a table in front of the window. Some of his lighter work, on which he

had been engaged before he left home two hours ago, lay there, his tools scattered before it; for he had intended to set to work again on his return. He had intended to work, and sitting down now, he mechanically took up a fine saw. But in a moment he laid it down again, and standing up, looked around the room with the same strange eyes whose troubled glance had disturbed Catherine up at the Hill Farm. On the walls were his rough charcoal sketches; chips of wood and half-finished pieces of work lay about; a small table laid for supper stood in the middle of the room; the church-key hung on its hook by the high chimney-shelf, on which stood neatly arranged his little store of china cups and saucers and ornaments. All around him were the familiar signs of the cares and joys of the life he had led these thirteen years past; but Caleb looked at them now with a sense that these things

had in some way lost that perfect fitness into which he and they had grown together, with a struggling, half-painful consciousness that the old placid life, rudely broken into the week before, was fallen completely from him now, fallen like a cast-off garment, never to be resumed.

As his eyes wandered round the room they fell upon a little china mug standing on the chimney-piece; on it the name 'Catherine' was inscribed in gilt, half-effaced letters. It had been his own present to his goddaughter when he first brought her home; and it had been left there forgotten when she went away. Caleb took it down now and carefully wiped the dust from its edge, handling it tenderly, as a thing to be touched with reverence; then setting it on the table where stood his untouched supper, he sat down and gazed at it fixedly for a few moments. Who shall say what memories

it awoke, and what emotions? Suddenly springing up, he stretched out his arm with a passion, a fire and excitement that transfigured the whole man.

'Cathy, Cathy, come back to me,' he cried, 'I love thee, Catherine, I cannot live without thee.'

He stopped, startled by the strangeness of his own voice breaking the silence of the room. But his words were a revelation to himself, an interpretation of the helpless longing, the heavy sense of loss and solitude that had settled down upon him like some dull, bewildering dream. He loved Catherine; he loved her, he loved her—— With a strange rapture he repeated the words to himself; he loved her. Nay, when had he not loved her? He had loved her from the day when as a child, she had put her little hand into his with a look of trust in her quiet eyes, until that other day when, grown through

her slim girlhood into a fair woman, she had crossed the threshold of his door, leaving behind her a dusky room that for ever missed her presence. He had always loved her. Their two lives had never mingled; they had lived under the same roof, and he had guarded her to the utmost fulfilment of his promise to her father; but always he had looked on at this mystery of childhood and girlhood growing up at his side as a thing altogether above and apart from himself; and it had needed, he knew it now, but a touch to change that gentle reverence into the passionate worship of a man for the woman he loves.

Caleb sat and pondered these things, his eyes fixed on the little gilt-edged mug before him, till the passion and the trouble passed from his eyes and in their place came an expression of infinite sweetness. His little lass was one, and

the woman he loved was one, and yet they were the same; and the ripeness and tenderness of such a love filled his soul for the hour with joy. Already the old life was beginning to absorb the new; scarcely, already, could he recal the time when Catherine had been other to him than she was now.

A tap at the casement startled him; and turning, he saw Will Franklin's face looking in from the outer darkness. Caleb rose and went to the window. The street was all dark, the upper lights were extinguished, the moon had disappeared behind uniform grey clouds, and a gentle rain was pouring down.

'Come in, lad, come in out of the rain,' Caleb said, 'I'll open the door.'

He went round and unlocked the front door. Will came in, shaking the raindrops from his rough coat as he entered the room.

'I saw your light burning, uncle,' he said, 'as I went up the street. My father's ill and I've been for the doctor. He told me that if I would wait twenty minutes he'd drive me home, so I came round to see you. I hardly thought, though, to find you up so late.'

Caleb glanced at the eight-day clock; it was past midnight.

'Why, I'd lost count o' the time altogether,' he said. 'Sit down, lad, and have some supper after your walk. What's wrong with your father?'

'I don't know,' said Will, 'he's been ailing this day or two, and wouldn't let me call in anyone. But to-night he's so much worse, that I came off for the doctor without letting him know.'

'Well, well, he'll thank you for it afterwards, maybe,' said Caleb; 'your father's not an easy man, Will, not an easy man; I've known that this many a year. But if

you're in want o' help, I'll come home with you and welcome.'

'Thank you, uncle; but I don't know that there's much to be done,' said Will; for Caleb's quarrel with his father, as he knew, had never yet been made up. 'I'll look in to-morrow evening, though, if I can, and tell you how we're going on, and what the doctor says.'

Will poured out, as he spoke, a glass of ale from a jug standing on the table. In doing so his attention was caught by the little china mug, and he took it up to examine it more closely.

'Why, this is Catherine's,' he said; 'how well I remember it. She used to lend it to me when I had been good, as she called it. How did it come here?'

'Well, it was forgotten, I suppose,' said Caleb, 'it'd been standing so long with the other china on the shelf there. I took it down this evening to dust it.'

Will stood gazing at the faded gilt 'Catherine,' much as Caleb had done an hour or two before. All at once his face flushed; with a hasty gesture he turned to his uncle as though about to speak; but Caleb checked him by taking the mug from his hand and replacing it on the shelf.

'I can't have it broken—it's been there so long,' he said, by way of apology. 'Besides,' he added, with a tender smile, 'it ain't mine, it's Cathy's; and maybe some day she'll like to have it again.'

Will looked at his uncle. Some change had come over him, inexplicable to the young man; his eyes were bright, he held his head more erect; something alert in step and gesture made him look ten years younger than his wont. Will looked at him in wonder; he forgot the words he had meant to speak; and the clock striking at that moment, he drank off his ale, and began buttoning up his coat.

'I must be off,' he said. 'Uncle, when you see Catherine, perhaps you'll tell her about my father; I may not be able to get up to the Hill Farm just at present. But I'll be over here again to-morrow.'

'Ay, ay, I'll tell her,' said Caleb. He followed Will to the door, bolted it behind him, and returned to the room. He came back slowly, and for a minute stood without moving; in the silence he heard the doctor's gig come rattling down the street, and the sound die in the distance. Then his head drooped, and he sank again into his chair. Will's visit had broken in upon the brightness of his dreams; it was not to be recovered. Nay, rather a subtle pain had stolen upon him, coming he knew not whence nor wherefore. He sat with his arm resting upon the table, his head on his arm; and so fatigue overcoming him, he must presently have fallen asleep; for he was aroused by a breeze blowing

freshly in, and looking up, saw a dripping dawn coming greyly in through the window, and so awoke, a new man, to the consciousness of a new day.

CHAPTER V.

On the morning of this same day that opened with such grey dawn, with such transfigured life for Caleb, Catherine and Will Franklin were walking together up the steep lane that led to the Hill Farm. Caleb's first thought, when Will had begged him to inform Catherine of his father's illness, was that here was an occasion to go up to the farm the next day when work was over. But Catherine had forestalled him. She had come down herself to the village to tell her god-father of an event that touched her closely—the sudden and unexpected death of her old bailiff. It

was a real trouble to Catherine. She had liked and trusted the old man; it was her first experience of the interference of death with the business of life, and it had fallen suddenly upon the peace and prosperity of her home-coming to the Hill Farm. Her first idea had been to go and tell Caleb; the strangeness of his conduct the evening before had passed for the time out of her mind, and there was nothing in his manner to-night to recal it. No, there was nothing to recal it; to Catherine, pre-occupied with other matters, he seemed just the same as usual as he sat there listening, with bent head, almost silent, hardly looking at her. If he was diffident and reserved, as he had never before been with Catherine, if he was burning with an intense consciousness that held him almost motionless in her presence, she only thought that he was tired, as he often was after his day's work,

and that she must not worry him too much with her own troubles.

She had risen to go when Will came in, as he had promised, to report on his father's state; and when he offered to walk home with her, she consented at once. Her little maid was there, indeed, and the two girls could have walked home safely enough along the quiet roads even after darkness had set in; but Catherine had her own reason for accepting Will's escort. There was a proposal she wanted to make to him about his home-affairs, which want of opportunity, want of courage too, perhaps, had withheld her from making hitherto. Even now, when they were alone, she still hesitated. Will also found little to say at first, and they walked on side by side, almost in silence, through the moonlit darkness towards the farm, the servant-girl loitering not far behind.

How had these two first learned to know they loved each other? Not a word of love had ever passed between them; nay, the frank companionship of their childish days had hardly yet changed in character. But love in its commencement has no need to write its tale in letters of fire across the heavens; its suggestions may be as delicate, yet its prophecy as sure, as those of the coming day, when the sky whitens to dawn, or reddens to sunrise. A flash of wonder, a deep red flush on Will's face when they first met after a separation of nearly three years, a fainter blush, a slight smile on Catherine's lips; these, or such as these, were all the signs either had ever given. Not a word of love had passed between them. Catherine was a rich woman, Will a poor and struggling man; and Will, although but a petty farmer, with a practical mind and ambitions no purer than those of strug-

gling mankind in general, loved Catherine with that first unreasoning love which abhors calculation, and introduces an element of passionate romance into the most egotistic character. A larger and simpler nature than his might have been capable of forgetting, for a time at least, the woman's riches in the woman. But this was impossible to Will. He was very ambitious, and he could not shut his eyes to the fact that, with Catherine's lands and Catherine's money at his disposal, most of his present ambitions would be within easy reach. His utmost stretch of magnanimity could only recognise with a sort of anger that this thought of Catherine's wealth in some way desecrated his love for Catherine herself.

Nevertheless, there had latterly arisen a certain consciousness between them, which now that they were together, led to silence. Both, too, were pre-occupied; Will with

the worry of his home affairs, from which not even Catherine's presence could set him free, and Catherine with the suggestion about those affairs which she at once wished and hesitated to make. And yet both were gradually wrought upon by the rare sentiment of the hour. The moon brightening from moment to moment in the warm-tinted sky, swept clear of clouds since last night's rain; the shadows that fell across the light-flooded path where the lane ran low between grassy tree-crowned banks; the still air filled with honey-scents and dew; the chirp and rustle of some wakeful bird; the sudden whirr of a night-moth circling round their heads, and the silence hardly broken by these, or by the loitering footsteps of the little maid as she now paused and lingered behind, now hurried to overtake them—all these things thrilled them to an intenser consciousness, set them in a remoter isolation, in which

the pulses of each seemed vibrating to one touch, the enchanted touch of the white and balmy night. Insensibly the space between them lessened as Will drew nearer to Catherine's side; his eyes sought hers, almost he touched her hand to clasp it as when in childhood they set out hand in hand on some childish expedition—— All at once the farm-lights shining at the turn of the lane broke the spell. Catherine moved away a pace from Will's side, and stood waiting for the girl behind to join them.

'Run on, Lizzie,' she said to her, 'and see that supper's ready.' Then turning to her companion: 'Will,' she said, rather hurriedly, 'I want, if you'll let me, to speak to you about your affairs. You're in a deal of trouble at home, I'm afraid, besides your father's illness.'

'Trouble enough,' Will answered, immediately recalled to a sense of his home

cares. 'Our lease is out at Michaelmas, and the squire has sent word that we must pay up all arrears, or he won't renew it. I may, or may not, be able to raise the money; but if I do, where's the good? We shall be as hard up as ever when next rent-day comes round; and now my father is down with rheumatic fever for the next three months, the doctor says. So there'll be the expense of his illness, and everything at a standstill besides, if he goes on as he does now; for he's got a notion into his head that nothing can be done unless he sees to it himself.'

Will spoke with a good deal of bitterness. Only that morning he had had a trying scene with his father, when the old man, made more obstinate and perverse by illness, had insisted on seeing the farm-men himself; and seeing them, had at once contradicted some orders his son had given.

'Why, that's hard,' said Catherine, 'for of course, Will, you know what is best to do.' They had reached the farm-house now; but, instead of going in, she turned on one side and went on with Will into the little garden at the back. As they passed along, her eye rested on her own barns and sheds and haystacks, on all the sheltered home enclosure and on the fields beyond, spreading peacefully in the moonlight, whence a plentiful harvest would presently be gathered in. As Will had said, everything prospered with Catherine.

'Will,' she said, 'I've been thinking it over, and it seems to me very hard that you, who know so much and could do so much, should be hampered for want of money, and that too, when there's so much money in the world, and a deal of it wasted.'

'That's in the nature of things,' said Will, rather gloomily, 'it's hard, as you say; but I daresay it's all right.'

'I don't think so,' said Catherine; 'since I've been rich, Will, I've understood a great many things about poor people that I never thought of before; I understand now why they say it's so hard they should suffer, when others have more than enough. I think perhaps they're right, and it is unjust, and I'd do anything I could to help them.'

'*I* don't say so,' answered Will, slightly nettled, 'though I'm poor enough, God knows.'

'I wasn't thinking of you,' said Catherine, simply; 'why, I never could think of you in that way,—not as being rich or poor, I mean. At least,' she went on, summoning up her courage finally, 'only so far as want of money prevents your doing what you think best down at the farm. And that's why I want to ask you, Will, whether you think a loan 'ud be any good to your father just now. It

need only be a business matter between him and me, you know, and it might help to set things straight again.'

Will walked on in silence for a few minutes, reflecting; trying to set what might be right towards his father against an almost unconquerable dislike to the idea of borrowing money from Catherine.

'Thank you, Catherine,' he said at last; 'but to speak frankly, as matters stand, it might only be throwing good money after bad. Later on, if we are harder up than I hope to be, about the rent, it might be right for my father's sake to accept your offer. But as regards the farm, my father has somehow let things go all to rack and ruin this last year or two, and though he says he wants my advice, as I told you, he won't take it. The luck's against us, I suppose, and we're in for a bad run; but heaven only knows how it will all end.'

He walked on gloomily at Catherine's side. She did not at once answer; her head was full of plans to help Will and his father, and she had thought beforehand it would be simple enough to propose them when once a beginning was made. But something in Will's tone checked her. At last she spoke.

'I'm in trouble, too, Will,' she said. 'Did you know? My grandmother's old bailiff, Martin, died quite suddenly to-day. I don't know what I shall do without him. He was a cross-grained old fellow in some ways, but he was good to me, and thoroughly honest; I'd quite counted upon him when I came up here for good. And now I shall have to look out for some one else, for I couldn't ever manage this big place all by myself. Even my grandmother always had Martin to help her, though she'd farmed for so many years. But whoever I get, I shall miss Martin sorely. And he

seemed quite well yesterday. I can't hardly believe it.'

Will was silent for a moment. Catherine's voice sounded sad, and tears came into her eyes as she finished speaking; he had never seen tears there before. At last:

'Would to heaven,' he cried, passionately, 'that I were a rich man, or that I had at least a shilling I could call my own; so that I might hold my head up in independence, and not stand here like a beggar, or worse. And you offer me money—you, Catherine!'

Catherine stood still.

'Why, Will, I never meant to vex you,' she said in a voice that trembled a little.

'Vex me!' he cried. He caught her hand in his. 'Tell me, Catherine,' he went on, vehemently, 'what would you think of a man who should seek to win

a woman better born, or richer, or—or —above him in any way of that sort, and had nothing to give her in return? Wouldn't you call him a beggarly scoundrel, though he loved her better than his own life?'

'No!' said Catherine. They had reached the end of the garden, where the path widened into a little grassy space, shut in by trees, and leafy fruit-bushes hung with gooseberries and ripening bunches of red and white currants; overhead stood the moon, showing in white distinctness each leaf and twig and blade of grass within the little enclosure, blanching Catherine's complexion, slightly tanned by the sun, to a dazzling fairness, and giving a more spiritual touch to her rounded features and pale golden hair. Her hand still lay in Will's. It was a moment in which another woman might have trifled or coquetted; but in

Catherine's large and simple nature no instinct was stronger than that of straightforward simplicity.

'I think,' she said, 'that when love is equal, there's nothing else can count. But if you set one thing against another in that way, why, then I think a man that's worth anything should be so much above a woman, in manliness and strength, that nothing of such things as you've mentioned should reckon for aught beside it.'

'Do you think that, Catherine?'

'I do, Will. I'd scorn a woman who could think otherwise.'

'I wish I could think so,' said Will gloomily, dropping her hand and turning away.

Catherine turned also, with a sudden revulsion of feeling. She had been so anxious to give clear expression to what she thought, that she had half lost sight

of any personal bearing in the question. But now that her words met no response from Will, she turned quickly, moving swiftly away out of the moonlight into the shade of a little overgrown path leading to the farm-house. In a second Will was at her side.

'Stay, Catherine,' he said, in a voice both passionate and pleading. 'Don't go yet; don't go till you hear what I have to say. I'm only a poor man, and I don't know that I shall ever be a rich one—not such as ought to think of winning you for a wife. But my life is yours, and you know it—you must have known it this long time past. Let me be your bailiff, your servant, what you will; let me serve you as Jacob served for Rachel—I'd wait for you more than twice seven years, Catherine.'

He spoke the last words in eager, tender accents, stretching out both hands to-

wards Catherine in the shadow. She turned again and placed her hands in his.

'Are you to give all, and I nothing?' she said, her voice trembling a little between sudden tears and laughter; 'that wouldn't be fair, either, to my thinking. One thing's yours already, what I care most to give you, Will—and so is all the rest. Why, what does it all matter?'

And together they walked back to the farm-house.

CHAPTER VI.

Will did not appear the following Sunday at the Hill Farm; but as Catherine was coming from afternoon church, a note was handed to her by a little farm lad. It was from Will.

'I have twice been up to the Hill Farm since last Tuesday, but you were away, staying with a friend, I was told. To-day my father is worse and I cannot leave him. I have been thinking over—I have thought of nothing else—all that passed the other evening, and of what I've often heard said about you, Catherine—that being what you are, you might make as good a marriage as any in the county.

And I say again that I've no right to let you bind yourself to a poor man like me. I can never care for anyone else; my love and life are yours, and you know it; and let my word stand to live and die in your service. But I will not put myself in the way of a better fortune for you; and so I hold you free, Catherine, if you will have it so, till in better times, perhaps, I can claim you as I should. And so God bless you——'

To this Catherine made the following answer, sending it down that same evening by one of the farm men:

'I do not know whether what I say is right, nor whether I shall rightly say what I mean. I'm no scholar, Will, like you, nor never shall be; you know that well enough by this time. But my thought is this, that after what passed the other evening, I could never hold myself free,

nor could I ever care to think of a better fortune. I did not speak in haste then; I meant what I said, and I say again now, that if love between us is equal, what matters ought else? But for the rest, all that I have is yours, as I also am altogether and for ever yours.

'CATHERINE.'

Caleb was again spending his Sunday evening at the farm. He also had not seen Catherine since the previous Tuesday—a whole lifetime, as it seemed to him, and a lifetime of emotion. For in a nature like his, when, among a hundred struggling impulses that never quite see the light, one passion is fully born, it must needs be of proportionate intensity. Caleb had more or less dimly felt his way to many things in life; but when he knew that he loved Catherine, it seemed to him that he lived for the first time. And yet

not even now, perhaps, was he fully awakened to the realities of that life. His position in regard to Catherine was so peculiar, his relations with her had been at once so intimate and so distant, that the transforming touch which revealed to him that he loved her, still left that love surrounded with something of remoteness. A tumult was in his brain, his passion absorbed him as it grew from day to day; and yet in one sense he held it as a child might hold a treasure of golden coins, a treasure of delight indeed, but one to be cherished for its own sake, without any thought of its uses for himself or for the world.

Naturally, therefore, the doubts and perplexities that were disturbing Will had no place in Caleb's mind. Catherine's wealth and position could have no importance for him; they had never been part of her in his eyes, less than ever could they they become so now. He planned no

definite future; he felt no immediate wish even to alter his present relations with Catherine. Nevertheless, he did at once, after his own fashion, make an effort to bring his life into some sort of harmony with hers. On the day when she had come to tell him of the death of her old bailiff, he had sat for a long time after she went away, troubled by her sadness and his inability to help her; till a sudden thought striking him he went out and up to the Vicarage, to ask the Vicar to lend him some books on agriculture.

'Are you going to turn farmer, Caleb?' said the Vicar, smiling, and looking out some old books on his shelves. 'Here are some volumes that are quite at your service; but I am afraid they are rather out of date, for they belonged to my father.'

Caleb made no reply to the Vicar's question; he took the books home and began to study them at once. He found it tough

work; he had not the most elementary knowledge of farming, and though Will's theories had interested him, the technical terms he met with now baffled him at every turn. But Caleb would not be baffled; Catherine was in need of help; perhaps he might learn to help her. All that evening and each succeeding evening, until long past midnight, he sat with his eyes fixed on the dull pages, as if to compel them to teach him what he wanted to know. Anyone looking in through the little window from the village street, might have thought this stooping lean-faced Caleb to be some old and dried-up student, caring for nothing but the dusty books whose leaves he slowly turned by the light of his one long-wicked candle. No one could have guessed, for there was nothing in his appearance to betray it, that here was a heart grown young and pathetically unwise through the force of a love so absorbing as to leave

no room for any consciousness but that of its own strength. And yet not young; for one is the youth of love, and another the love of older life. Was Caleb happy as he sat there? A strange fever possessed those midnight hours, an immeasurable longing, an endless unrest. Often he would push aside the volumes with their terms and jargon strange to him as an unknown tongue, and sit with his arms stretched out over the table, his eyes fixed on the opposite wall. 'Catherine, Catherine!' he would repeat under his breath; till his voice, breaking above a whisper, would startle him by a cry that died within the narrow compass of the room, but seemed to him loud enough to waken the sleepers under every roof in the village. Then once more drawing the book towards him, he would sit dimly peering into its pages, till fatigue compelled him to desist; and presently,

with returning day, the day's work brought to him a saner mood.

On this Sunday evening, whilst Catherine was writing her letter to Will, Caleb sat smoking as usual by the farm fire. He had at once fallen back, as has been said, into his old manner towards Catherine; the custom of years is not readily changed. Something less dreamy he was, perhaps, a trifle more nervous and abrupt; but the change was still too slight for Catherine to note, especially just now, when she was pre-occupied as she had never in her life been before.

She came back when she had sent off her note, and drawing a chair forward, seated herself at Caleb's side. It was already dusk in the low-beamed room, but in the Sunday leisure no light was needed beyond the red glow on the hearth, and the grey summer twilight, brightened by a single star, filled the long lattice.

Catherine sat down quietly without speaking, for the profound feeling that had stirred her whilst writing to Will had hardly yet subsided. But when, indeed, was Catherine not quiet? In her busiest moments she spoke and moved without haste or bustle; and if through this tranquil temperament she lost some of the charm natural to youth, its impulses, its unthinking gaiety, its winning perversities and contradictions, the immense tenderness of her nature atoned to those who knew her for such deficiency, if deficiency it must be called. Cast in too large a mould for the common joys of girlhood, she was young through the strength and depth of her passions, through her unreasoning hopefulness, and her enjoyment of the bounteous lot that had so far made up her experience of life.

She sat now in an attitude of repose,

leaning back in her chair, her eyes, in which was a very sweet expression, fixed absently on the fire, one hand supporting her cheek, the other mechanically stroking a large tabby cat, which wandering round the room, had finally leaped into its favourite resting-place on Catherine's lap. Caleb, turning his head, looked at her, and something persistent in his gaze presently compelled her attention. She roused herself and met his eyes with a smile. Catherine was rarely inattentive to her godfather's presence, but she had forgotten it now. Caleb looked away again, and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

'Have you done anything about a bailiff, Cathy?' he said at last, breaking the long silence.

Catherine coloured a little. 'Nothing yet, godfather,' she said, thinking of one bailiff who had already offered himself.

'Catherine ought to get a husband, that's what I say,' said Mrs. Matthews, in her high-pitched, tremulous voice, 'and she's a girl to pick and choose as she likes, for there's many a one 'd be glad enough to have her. There's young Reynolds, who wears a gold chain and as good a coat as the squire himself, comes to Haysted church as regularly as Sunday comes round for nought but to look at her. But Catherine's getting a name for holding her head too high, and looking down upon them as are as good as she, and that's always a bad thing for a girl. She'd best make her choice now, whilst she can have it her own way, and take who she likes.'

Caleb listened to these words. A tremor passed through him; he let his pipe fall on the hearth, and it lay there in fragments. Catherine's marriage had never occurred to him as an immediate possibility. Once, a year or two before, she

had had an offer from a rich farmer, whose fields adjoined her own, and she had then told her god-father she did not want to marry, ever. He had accepted her words, not for what a girl's words in such a case are worth, but as a statement of fact, and thought no more of the matter. But Mrs. Matthews had put the subject before him in a new light, in which he vaguely saw himself also; and that no longer simply as the man who loved Catherine, but as others might view him, the man who should seek to win her. He turned to Catherine, shading his eyes with his hand.

'Have you ever thought o' marrying, Cathy?' he said, in a low voice.

Catherine was engaged in picking up Caleb's pipe and finding him another, and did not immediately answer. His question disconcerted her. That very evening she had meant to speak to her godfather about herself and Will; but Will's note had

changed her intention. She did not like to say anything before hearing from him again.

'I have thought of it, godfather,' she said at last, without looking round.

Caleb sat gazing into the fire, rubbing his forehead slowly with one hand.

'What Mrs. Matthews says is very true, Cathy,' he said at last, in a troubled voice; 'you're a girl as might make as good a marriage as any in the land. Would that be your way now, Cathy, of looking at things?'

'As how, godfather?'

'To look out for a man who could give you money and land, and make a lady of you, maybe?'

'No,' answered Catherine, 'I should never care to be other than I am, godfather.'

'Then,' said Caleb, slowly, 'if a poor man—a man as had nothing to recommend

him but that he loved you, Cathy—was to come to you, and was to ask you to be his wife; then, if you loved him, you'd say "yes"?'

'I would,' said Catherine. She turned quickly to Caleb as she spoke; her breath came quicker, her colour rose, nearly in that moment she had told him all. But again she checked the impulse as before, and moved away quickly to the window. What did her godfather mean? Had he seen Will? could Will have spoken to him?

Caleb, on his side, sat silent. He had spoken without premeditation; the words still sounded in his ears when he had done speaking, as though another than himself had uttered them—nay, as though Catherine's answer had been made to another than himself. He also rose presently, and as Catherine began to busy herself about the supper, slowly paced the room. The troubled look had deepened on his face. He felt

shaken from such fevered bliss as his dreams had known in these last four days; disturbed in that lonely Paradise in which he had sought his joy, and thought they might walk hand in hand together.

CHAPTER VII.

Caleb spent that night at the farm. He had business at L——, a town some twenty miles off, connected with some fittings to a library that he had been commissioned to execute; and the Hill Farm standing about half way between Haysted and the point on the high-road where he could catch the passing coach, he had arranged to sleep there on Sunday night, taking the coach to L—— on Monday, and returning on Tuesday evening to Haysted.

He bade farewell that morning to Catherine as she stood in the flagged passage-room leading from the kitchen to the dairy. The early June sun streamed in through

the open doors and windows, glorifying the rough walls, and casting thin shadows from the fluttering green leaves outside on to the stone-paved floors. There was a smell of fresh-baked bread mingling with the scent of the homely garden flowers; the loaves just drawn from the oven stood piled on the kitchen dresser, but the kitchen itself was empty; hardly anyone was about; for all the hands that could be spared had gone to help in the haymaking, and Catherine with one of the maids was engaged in packing sundry bottles of cider and buttermilk in baskets to be carried up to the hayfields later on.

She smiled as Caleb came up, and went on filling the basket that stood beside her close to the open garden door. Outside, a little child belonging to one of the farm-labourers, was toddling about in the sunshine, shaking its skirt at a brood of downy chickens, who, watched by

a distracted hen cooped on the grassy bank, were straying about the path and over the threshold. The cat, stealthily climbing an apple-tree in pursuit of a bird, came with a leap to the ground as it missed its prey; and the child frightened by the sudden spring, ran screaming with outstretched arms through the door into the room where Catherine was at work. Catherine, who loved children, stooped down and taking up the little thing set it on the table beside her, smoothing down its pinafore and its ruffled hair, yellow and fluffy as the chicken's down, and stopping its wide-mouthed screams with a kiss and a piece of cake. Caleb looked on in silence at the sunshiny homely scene, that ever after lived in his memory. Last night's trouble still lay latent in his mind; he had hardly spoken that morning. But he looked at Catherine with a profound melancholy and tenderness in his eyes, of which she, intent

on her work, remained unconscious. She was intent on her work; but she had tied a ribbon in her shining hair, and through her busiest moment ran the thought that Will would surely find time to come that morning and answer her note in person.

'Good-bye, Cathy,' said Caleb at last, 'I'll try to look in on my way back to-morrow evening and tell you how I've got on.

Catherine nodded and smiled in answer, and taking the child on one arm accompanied her godfather to the farm-yard gate. Caleb paused when he got there; he wanted to speak to Catherine before he left. He wanted to say to her—what? He himself could not have told. To repeat the words he had spoken last night? A weight lay on his heart and brain and held him silent.

'I'm loth to leave you, Catherine,' was all he said at last.

'Why, godfather, it's only till to-morrow,' said Catherine, in some wonder. She stood lingering with her hand on the latch of the gate. 'Shall you be going near Franklin's farm, godfather?' she said; 'are you likely, do you think, to see anything o' Will?'

Caleb looked up sharply. There is no form of strong love without its complement of latent jealousy. It seemed to Caleb all at once that Catherine thought and spoke overmuch of Will.

'How should I be likely to see anything o' Will?' he said. 'Franklin's is more than a mile t'other side of the high-road, and I don't know what should take me there. I haven't forgotten the sort o' welcome I got the last time I went, though my sister was living then, and one would have thought Franklin might ha' found a civil word to say to his wife's brother.'

He went on his way, vexed with himself for his own irritation and for the

sharp words he had spoken. The point on the high-road where he was to meet the coach was nearly two miles from the farm. He had allowed himself more than enough time for the walk; but avoiding the intricacies of the lanes, he struck straight across the moorland by a path that was little more than an irregular track, winding at first among low mounds and dells, soft with sheep-nibbled turf, strewn with tiny flowers, and then along a wilder tract of ground, where on one side it skirted a high broken bank grown over with furze and bracken, and on the other overhung the precipitous sides of a deep sand-pit. Beyond, it dipped down a steep incline to a marshy bottom, and finally emerged on the high-road.

Caleb walked on more quickly than was usual with him, trying to shake off the discomfort of his nervous irritation. He had already crossed the stretch of moor-

land lying immediately behind the Hill Farm, and had reached the spot where the path narrowed above the sand-pit, when he saw Will coming towards him, walking briskly in the fresh morning air. His father was better; and with Catherine's letter in his pocket, and her words at his heart, it was impossible, he found, not to go up to the Hill Farm, in the hope of seeing her. He was walking along joyously, now whistling, now breaking into snatches of song, his head full of the woman he loved, and of the future that lay before him. To do Will justice, he thought most of Catherine; but it was only natural that his mind should also dwell upon himself as Catherine's husband. For years his best-defined ambition had been to farm his own lands, to try his own experiments, to become a gentleman-farmer; perhaps, who knows? a squire even, receiving rents, hunting with his

own horses, taking his place as an equal among the county gentry. Never had such ambitions been stronger than since his return home, since he had found himself at every turn hampered through want of money. And now, as master of the Hill Farm, what might he not accomplish?

A hundred plans were occupying the young fellow's mind, yes, and worthier thoughts too—thoughts of how he would henceforward be a better man than he had ever been before, more worthy of such a woman as he knew Catherine to be—when he saw his uncle approaching, and paused on his own rapid way to speak to him.

'Why, lad, what brings you up in this direction so early?' said Caleb. 'How's your father?'

'My father is much easier this morning,' said Will; 'more like himself than he's been for this week past. As to what

brings me here, uncle, I'm on my way to the Hill Farm, to see Catherine.'

'And whatever need take you to the Hill Farm at this hour o' the morning?' said Caleb, all his irritation instantly revived. 'I should have thought, Will, that with your father lying sick at home you might ha' found something better to do than be running up to see Catherine at this time o' day.'

Caleb's tone passed unnoticed by Will; indeed, he hardly heard the words; for a sudden impulse had come over the young fellow to tell his uncle everything. Yes, as Catherine's guardian for so many years, he had a right to know as soon as possible what was going on. He answered, therefore, without making any direct reply to Caleb.

'Uncle,' he said, getting rather red, 'I want to speak to you about Catherine and myself. It's only just settled, or I should

have spoken before; but I know she would think as I do, that you ought to know that I've asked her to be my wife, and that she has consented——'

He stopped, startled by the change in his uncle's face, as Caleb turned and leaned back against the bank by which they were standing.

'What?' he said. 'What's that you're saying? Let's hear it again, lad.'

'I was saying,' repeated Will, rather taken aback, 'that Catherine has consented to be my wife.'

'Consented to be your wife?' said Caleb, slowly. 'Why, you don't hardly know each other, you two, not to call knowing. You didn't see each other for years, till a few weeks back, and I've hardly seen you speak to one another. Have you and Cathy been deceiving me?' he said, in a louder voice, looking at the young man and frowning.

'There has been no deceit in the

matter,' answered Will, with some heat; 'one doesn't need to know Catherine long to love her.'

'Love her?' said Caleb, with a sort of angry laugh. 'What can a lad like you know about love? Why, I love Cathy, and that's a different kind o' love to yours, I take it. Do you hear, boy? I love her, I tell you.'

Will stared at his uncle. He must certainly be out of his mind; that was the young man's first idea, as all Caleb's queer ways flashed across him. He kept down his rising anger, and answered as quietly as he could.

'Of course you love Catherine, uncle,' he said, 'we all know that; why, you have been like a father to her all these years. That is why I am speaking to you now. I thought it would not be right to go on without your consent.'

'My consent to what?' said Caleb. 'I

tell you that I love Catherine, and that's plain English, ain't it? And what's your love to mine? Tell me that.'

He raised himself as he spoke and stood confronting the young man, his stick planted firmly on the ground, but his whole frame as he leaned on it, trembling with passion. Will made no immediate reply, and Caleb went on with increasing vehemence.

'What's your love compared to mine, I say? I've loved Cathy since she was so high, since she was a little thing as would come over with her father, and take a sup out o' my cup and look up smiling in my face. Why, I loved her when you was nought but a little chap, getting your schooling; and if I only found it out a week ago, it's because I've been a fool—a fool. What's a lad like you, that was at your spelling-book the other day, to know of love compared to me?'

Will was confounded by his uncle's vehemence. If he were mad, there was reason and coherence in his madness; yes, and a passion that could assert itself with overwhelming force. A blind anger towards a rival such as this took possession of the young fellow.

'A fool?' he answered. 'I should think you'd need to be a fool indeed, uncle, to think of a girl like Catherine. Why, everyone talks about you as "old Caleb," and she looks upon you as a father—as a grandfather for aught I know.'

'Looks on me as a father, does she?' said Caleb, in a voice hoarse with passion; 'then I'll act a father's part by her, as you shall see. She shall not be left at the mercy of every penniless lad as comes courting her for her money, and thinks he'll make a fine thing out o' marrying her. I'll have a word or two with Cathy before that comes about. Go your way home, lad;

not a step nearer to the Hill Farm shall you go to-day. I've something to say to Catherine too, and I'll say it. Go home, I say. Why, damn it all, you're your father's son after all, I believe.'

Caleb was standing in front of Will now, barring the narrow path. Will grew furious. No words could have been so stinging as those just uttered by Caleb.

'Are you mad, uncle?' he cried, 'go to the farm and welcome. Say what you like to Catherine; what do I care? But let me pass—let me pass, I say!'

Will raised his voice as he uttered the last words, and slightly shifted a small stick that he was carrying. The action roused Caleb in his turn to fury.

'Would you strike a man old enough to be your father?' he cried; 'why, go to the devil then—two can play at that game, my lad.'

He tried to wrench the stick from Will's

hand, but failing, seized him by the collar, and flung him violently backward. The young man, unprepared for the attack, staggered, missed his footing on the narrow pathway, and fell headlong down the precipitous bank into the sand-pit below. The height was considerable, though the fall was broken here and there by furze bushes; at the bottom, half buried in the sand, lay an old cart overturned; and as Will fell, his head struck violently against one of the iron-bound corners, and he lay motionless.

For the longest minute in his life, Caleb watched the strong young hands that caught desperately at one bush and another only to lose their momentary hold, and heard the dull fall below. For another minute he stood, paralysed by horror; then trembling, shaken from head to foot by a chill dread, he made his way down a little sloping path that led to the

sandpit. He knelt down beside Will; he loosened his necktie and raised his head; he laid his shaking hand upon his pulse and heart; but there was neither sign nor movement. Will was dead.

It seemed ages to Caleb's stunned consciousness before he raised himself from his knees, trying to steady his whirling thoughts; but in truth it was not many minutes. He looked round the lonely sand-pit, where the morning sunshine lay warm and clear, and the bees were humming among the gorse-flowers; then stood gazing down on the motionless form at his feet. He never thought of seeking help; he never doubted that Will was dead. The attitude in which the young fellow lay, his half-closed eyes and fast-chilling hands, left no suspense in Caleb's mind on that point. Moreover, there had been a momentary deadly meaning in his action, a purpose not of continuous death, but of

instant, swift vengeance, that must, he felt, have worked its own fulfilment. And yet in a minute he knelt down again, chafing the cold hands with hands that trembled so much they could hardly do his bidding, striving in his despairing terror to bring back one spark of life; but in vain. Will was dead.

Caleb raised himself once more and for a long time stood motionless, with no immediate sensation beyond a numbing horror, a dull wonder at this strange silence, this sudden quenching of vigorous young life and manhood; then with slow unsteady steps he began to move towards the path that led from the sand-pit. He moved away, but with no thought either of concealment or of flight. Caleb had the instincts of an honest and simple man, not of a criminal; and one moment's action, however desperate, could not change the traditions of a lifetime. He had no thought of conceal-

ment; on the contrary, through all the sick horror that was shaking him from head to foot, confusing his senses with physical cold and helplessness, one certainty made itself felt—that the only thing left to him now was to confess what he had done before heaven and earth, and through such confession expiate his guilt.

It was with this feeling that he roused himself, making a few steps forward, uncertainly, like one dazed with dreams, drugged with sleep, but still with a definite purpose to tell his story to the first man he should meet. As he slowly moved away from Will's side, feeling with his stick as he went, he saw an open paper lying on the ground near him. It was Catherine's note to Will, which had fallen from his pocket as he fell. It attracted Caleb's attention, alive to every trifle, as men's attention is apt to be in the great crises of life; slowly stooping, he picked it up. He

recognised the writing at once, and as his eyes fell on the concluding words, 'altogether, and for ever yours, Catherine,' he dropped the paper with a cry of anguish that seemed to rend his very soul and scatter the cloud of bewildered horror that had confused his thoughts. It was true then, what Will had said. Catherine loved him; yes, it was Will she loved . . . . And he—oh, God! he had worked not only the destruction of a life dear to him from its beginning, but a destruction no less fatal, that of the happiness of the woman he loved. As Catherine's grief rose before Caleb's mind, he was seized with a passionate despair. What would her life be henceforward? Her lover was dead; he lay there dead; and her godfather whom she loved, to whom she would naturally cling in her sorrow, would stand before all the world as the slayer of that lover, of one whom he had loved almost as his own son.

To whom could Catherine turn? Who would help and support her when he, her second father, was pointed at by all men as a murderer? Caleb dropped his head on his hands and groaned aloud in his utter despair. What retribution could fall on him that would not be light compared with Catherine's shame and sorrow when his deed became known? . . . . Then let it remain unknown; a deed of darkness, let the darkness of silence cover it. Let him bear for ever the intolerable weight of a hidden sin, rather than bring such desolation upon her young life.

Hardly had Caleb come to this resolution, striving with a desperate effort to command his thoughts enough to know what he must do next, when he heard voices approaching, and with a sudden instinctive fear that seemed to blast his entire life, he hurriedly hid himself behind a clump of bushes that had taken root in

one corner of the sand-pit. The voices came nearer, and presently he saw two men who were bringing down a donkey-cart by another road to cart away some sand. Caleb shrank further back into his hiding-place; but though he could no longer see what passed, he could hear. He could distinguish the sudden pause, the exclamation of the men as they discovered Will, the silence as they stooped down to examine him.

'It's young Franklin,' he heard one of them say at last. 'I know him well; I've worked on his father's farm. He must ha' met with an accident, and slipped down from the path up there. He were a steady-going young chap, else I should say he must ha' been drunk to miss his footing. It's none so narrow as all that.'

'I've said any time this twenty year there'd be an accident up yonder, with neither hedge nor fence above that bit o'

bank,' said the other, in a thick, husky voice; 'we'd best take the lad home and send for a doctor. He's only stunned.'

'Nay, he's dead,' said the other man; 'I can see that well enough. But we'll take him home none the less, for the cart's handy, and if the doctor can do him no good, he can do him no harm neither now. So lend a hand, will you?'

They said a few more words in a lower tone. Caleb, with his intent watching, could hear their movements as they raised Will from the ground and slowly retreated. At last the sound of steps and voices died away; and in the succeeding silence, he came out from his concealment and looked about him.

Then, indeed, a horror of great darkness fell upon him, as he stood face to face with what he had done. Will was gone—a trodden spot on the sand, a blank space, a deathlike silence settling down,

were all that remained where he had been. For him nothing more could be done or undone for ever; for himself there remained to take up his life just where he had left it one half-hour before, but a life to be weighed down henceforward by an awful memory, by an unutterable burden of secret sin that could never be removed. Caleb, searching through this darkness in which the sky seemed to have grown black above his head, strove to find one familiar thought from his past world to help him, and strove in vain. He fell upon his knees on the sand where he stood, crying aloud in his anguish, 'My God, my God, help me!' But no answer came; only the weight of darkness seemed to draw closer and closer round him like a palpable cloud. To a man like Caleb, who, with no profound theological views, had yet a simple piety, a habit of referring his daily actions to

be judged by an invisible standard of right and wrong, no catastrophe could be so awful as this sudden hiding of the face of God, this swift opening of a spiritual hell in which nothing remained to him of the faiths of his past but the conviction of sin, the dread certainty of judgment. As he knelt there on the sand, his whole frame shivered and trembled under this terrible sense of the irrevocable, this cutting off for ever from every hope and joy and emotion that had constituted his life so far.

The necessity for action saved him from madness, as it has saved many a man before. He thought of Catherine, and the thought at that moment was salvation; for her, something still remained to be done. Were anyone to find him in the sand-pit, his presence there would connect him at once with Will's death, and all that for Catherine's sake he wished to conceal

would be discovered. Nay, if he wished to escape suspicion, he could do no less than carry out his original intention of going to L——, transact his business there, and return home the following evening as he had proposed. Caleb then slowly gathered himself together; and still trembling in every limb, groping blindly in the bright sunshine, made his way out of the sand-pit, and with such haste as he could use, down the steep bit of moorland beyond. The coach to L—— was half-an-hour late, and was just coming up as Caleb reached the high-road. He mounted on the top, and was carried on his way.

He went on his way with the ever-present vision of the scene in the sand-pit crossed by another vision, that of the moment when the lad should be carried over the threshold of his desolate home. But Caleb was wrong; Will was never to pass

his father's door again. Hardly was the cart well outside the sand-pit, when the driver pulled up his horse and paused.

'I wouldn't take him to Franklin's farm neither,' he said to his companion, 'it's nigh upon three mile from this, and old Franklin's lying ill, so that such a shock might kill him outright. Best carry him to the Hill Farm; it's not above a mile across the heath, and he's known there. If there's ought to be done for him, it'll be done.'

And to the Hill Farm Will was carried.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was near dusk the following evening when Caleb, with bent head and dragging footsteps, approached the Hill Farm. The fever that succeeds a deed of violence was upon him; he must know the worst as it was known to other men; he could not keep away. But about the farm all lay quiet and as usual in the evening light; the haymakers were returning from their work, the homely farm sounds were settling down into the night's rest. Caleb, who had fought his way through the blackness of the last thirty-six hours by the glimmer of hope that had come to him in the words, 'He's only stunned,' felt that

hope strengthen; longing and dreading to see Catherine, he made his way into the kitchen. No one was there but Mrs. Matthews, standing over a saucepan by the fire. She turned round and threw up her hands with a shrill cry when she saw Caleb.

'It's you at last, Caleb Field,' she said. 'To think you should ha' been away, to think of it. Have you heard the news? Do you know what's happened to your own nephew since you left these doors only yesterday?'

'Ay—I've heard summat,' said Caleb, in a low voice; 'but it ain't true—I trust in God it ain't true. The lad ain't really dead?'

'Ay, but he is,' said Mrs. Matthews, in her shrill old tones, beginning to cry. 'He's dead, sure enough, poor lad. The doctor was sent for, and all was done as should be done; but there were never any

hope. He must ha' been killed on the spot, they said; there weren't a breath o' life in him when they brought him in.'

Mrs. Matthews put her apron to her eyes, and lifted the saucepan from the fire. Caleb seated himself slowly and painfully in his accustomed seat by the hearth, leaned forward with his hand shading his eyes, and so sat silent for a while. Fortune could not better have favoured his wish to keep his secret than by giving him this first interview with Mrs. Matthews. She was the last person in the world to question him, or to criticise his behaviour.

'How's Cathy?' he said at last, with an effort.

'Catherine takes on so as never was,' said Mrs. Matthews, wiping her old eyes. 'She were in here yesterday when they brought the lad in and laid him on the settle yonder——'

She stopped as Caleb sprang to his feet,

his whole frame convulsed, as by some violent shock.

'What!—here?' he said. 'Good God—they brought the lad in here?'

'Ay—didn't you know that, Caleb Field?' said the old woman, beginning to cry again. ''Twas a matter o' two miles nearer than to Franklin's farm, so they brought him here straight. And Catherine, she were standing here, as might be, and she were just saying, "I think I'll go up to the near meadow myself for an hour, and if I'm wanted by anyone, you'll know where I am, granny," when they brought the lad in, and laid him down on the settle. And Catherine just stands and stares for a minute, and then down she goes on her knees beside him, and flings up her arms like a mad-woman. And I says to her, "Catherine, this is neither the place nor the conduct for a young woman like you." And she answers me, "This is

my affair; you've neither to meddle nor make here. He was to ha' been my husband; nobody knew it before, but all the world may know it now." And so she's gone on ever since.'

Caleb stood speechless, grasping the back of the chair with both hands, shaken from head to foot by this new shock. Here, under Catherine's own roof, lay her dead lover—here lay the man whom he had slain.

'Where—where's Catherine?' he said, speaking at last in hoarse, almost inaudible tones.

'She's with him upstairs,' said Mrs. Matthews; 'he's laid out there in the best sheets, looking handsomer than he ever did in his life, poor lad, though he were always a good-looking young fellow, and Catherine stays by him night and day. She never undressed last night, nor slept a wink, I believe. She don't cry and she

don't speak; every now and then she'll come wandering down and around like a ghost, looking about her, but with never a word, and as if she saw never a thing; then up she goes again, and there's nothing'll move her. Poor lass, poor lass, she takes it hard, she do. And I telling her only two days back she ought to get herself a husband.'

Caleb made no reply. He stood silent a while, with bowed head and stooping form, leaning on the back of the chair; then with uncertain steps began to move towards the door. In a moment he paused, steadying himself against the corner of the table.

'Where?' he said again, hoarsely, without turning his face towards Mrs. Matthews.

'In the corner-room you'll find 'em,' she said. 'I wanted to have him laid out in the best bed-room, where my husband

died, for I said, "It ain't lucky to have death in every room in the house." But Catherine, she would have it her own way.'

The corner-room was one that in the old-fashioned rambling house opened off an angle of the staircase, and overlooked the garden. Driven, compelled by that resistless impulse, that imperious desire to see and know the worst, Caleb unclosed the door, and paused upon the threshold with a sickening shuddering dread he could not at once overcome. Two steps led down into the room, with its low-beamed ceiling and simple farm furniture. The light had almost left the lattice, and a dim candle burned on the table at the further end; dark-flowered chintz draped the casement and big arm-chair, and curtained the bed; but on the side towards the room the curtain had been drawn back, revealing a white-sheeted form that lay there on the couch motionless.

Beside it sat Catherine, motionless almost as itself. She was leaning back in her chair, her head thrown back, her hands folded loosely, as though she had dropped there from exhaustion: now and then a slight shiver ran through her, and her pale face, which seemed to have grown thinner since yesterday, was fixed in a strange, strained expression. But as Caleb approached her at last with his slow, dragging steps, she moved her head, looking at him uncertainly for a while as doubting whom it might be; recognizing him then, she mechanically held out one hand towards him, and turning her face again, remained motionless as before.

Caleb took her hand, and held it loosely for a moment in his cold fingers, steadying himself, meanwhile, by the grasp of his other hand on the foot-post of the bed. A strong convulsive trembling shook his whole frame; for two minutes he may have

stood thus, his eyes fixed on the ground, not daring to look on the dead. Will lay with his head slightly raised on a broad, lace-bordered pillow, his brown curls fell on his forehead, he looked hardly more than a boy; yes, and on his face now was something of the boy's candour and simplicity of expression that had passed from it otherwise in these later years, mingled with the strange wisdom of death. When Caleb at last raised his eyes, he all at once felt, apart from his miserable remorse, a despairing sorrow for this young life cut off, a yearning love and pity for his sister's son, for the lad whose growth he had watched with pride since he was a little round-cheeked child. His breast heaved; with a half-uttered groan he dropped his head on his hands and broke into deep sobs.

His tears relieved the terrible tension of the moment, but they brought no other

relief; they could do nothing to lighten the pressure of his load, or shake aside the blackness that had fallen like a curtain between him and his old life. But in Catherine this strong agony of a man's tears touched a new chord. She began to tremble, her hands tightened their clasp; she too at length burst into weeping, sobs that seemed to rend her very breast, a storm of tears raining down upon the pillow in which she buried her face, as though to stifle the sound of her despair.

The sight of this passionate, living grief by the side of Will's still face, that could not change for all the sorrow of the woman he had loved, wrought in Caleb a new anguish. Lifting his hands above his head—

'Would to God,' he cried, 'would to God, Cathy, would to God, it had been my life in the stead o' the lad's!'

Catherine heard the words; Caleb had

been her care and her charge for too many years for his heartbroken cry not to reach her even now. Still weeping passionately, she rose, and putting both arms round his neck, laid her head on his shoulder, as if in recognition of their common grief. Caleb, by a strong effort of the will, stood rigidly passive under her embrace, that seemed to scorch him like flame, to brand him like red-hot iron; for it made no part of his purpose to betray his guilty shrinking from her innocent touch. Only he said at last,

'I've no words to comfort thee with, Cathy—no words, my lass.'

Catherine loosened her hold; her arms dropped from Caleb's neck; she sank again into her seat, altogether apart from him, as he felt in helpless misery. The strained look on her face had passed with her weeping, but in its place was utter despair.

'There is no comfort,' she said, speaking for the first time. 'If it were only my own sorrow,' she went on, in broken accents. 'I could bear it, though it's a sore one; but it's him I'm thinking of. He's so young—he never wished to die .... Oh, it's cruel, cruel——'

'Ay, it is cruel,' Caleb answered, in a low voice; then suddenly stretching out his arm, 'Why should it ha' been?' he cried passionately, 'why should it ha' been allowed to be?'

He checked himself, fearing to say too much; and for a time there was silence. Then Caleb spoke again.

'You should ha' told me, Cathy,' he began, in a low uncertain voice, looking as he spoke towards Will, as if he too could hear the words; yes, if the lad were anywhere that he could hear, he should know how sorely his uncle repented. 'You should ha' told me, my lass, how you and him loved

each other. I never guessed it; God help me, I never guessed it. If I'd known, I should ha' come to see as how it was the best thing for you both—yes, I should—if I hadn't been taken by surprise. But I never guessed it; I never saw you much together, nor thought you'd much to say to each other. God knows I never so much as thought of it once.'

Caleb spoke, but his words fell on silence. Will could not hear, Catherine heeded him no longer; he was alone in his remorse and his despair. He turned, and in silence left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

Enquiry was diligently made into the possible cause of Will's death: but no further light was thrown upon the subject. There was no reason to suspect foul play; the young man had had no enemies, and his money and silver watch were of course found untouched. Moreover, when Hodge the labourer repeated his husky assertion that he had been expecting an accident to happen at the old sand-pit any time this twenty year, there were half-a-dozen people ready to prove themselves his equal in prophetic wisdom by stating a similar conviction. It was then universally accepted as a fact that the saddest event

known in Haysted for many years, had come about through a simple accident.

The funeral was fixed for the following Sunday. The day before, Caleb went to the vicarage and resigned his place as clerk.

'For a time, Caleb,' said the Vicar, kindly, 'we will find a substitute for a time; but we cannot consent to part with you altogether. You are too valuable to us.'

'No, sir,' said Caleb, 'I must give it up altogether. I've had a shock, sir, I've had a shock; I ain't myself, nor ever shall be again.' He shivered slightly as he sat leaning forward in his chair, his elbows resting on his knees, his head bowed on his hands, a haggard and utterly broken-down man. The Vicar looked at him in kindly compassion.

'You take this too much to heart, Caleb,' he said. 'I am aware how great your

affection was for your nephew, and that the shock to you must have been a heavy one. But time will do much to heal your sorrow, as well as that of others who have more reason than you even to mourn the poor fellow's death. And then, as Christians, we must believe that everything is ordained for the best, and submit to the will of Providence.'

'For God's sake, sir, don't talk to me of the will o' Providence,' said Caleb, suddenly springing up and standing erect. 'It warn't the will o' Providence that Will should die, the best and finest lad in the country round, and leave my Cathy broken-hearted, and his father nigh crazed for want of him. I know better than that, sir; and I'm thinking there's many things in the world that ain't for the best, and with which Providence has nought to do —and then them that's innocent have to suffer most, and that's a cruel thing—but

it's all a puzzle to me, and I see no way out of it.'

Caleb's head sank upon his breast as he finished speaking. The momentary fire died out of his eyes and his voice, and he stood motionless, his hands resting on the back of his chair.

'Well, Caleb,' said the Vicar, after a pause, 'you are not quite yourself to-day, and we will not argue the point further; for I think that you yourself will come to see in time that submission to God's will is all that is fitting for us poor mortals, who can see but a little way into the decrees of Fate. But I wanted to speak to you about your goddaughter. I hear that she was engaged to this poor young man, and is in much trouble.'

'Ay, sir,' said Caleb, in a low voice, 'she's nigh heart-broken, poor lass—that it should be so.'

'I should be glad to be of use to her if

I could,' said the Vicar with kindness ; 'if I call this afternoon, shall I find her at home?'

'She'll be at home, sir, she don't stir from the house,' said Caleb, taking his hat and preparing to go. 'I don't know as she'll see you. She's heart-broken, poor lass—God help her.'

When Caleb went to the farm, he told Catherine of the Vicar's intended visit. She raised her heavy eyes with languor.

'Why should he come?' she said.

'He thought you were in grief, Cathy,' said Caleb, 'and that he might be able to comfort you, maybe.'

'My grief is my own,' she answered; 'no one can touch it. I do not care for him to come—unless you would like it, godfather?' she said, turning to Caleb with something of her old solicitude.

'No, child,' said Caleb, 'I've seen the parson, and we've talked together. But he's got no words to fit me.'

He turned as he spoke, and left Catherine abruptly. Every day he went up to the Hill Farm for a few minutes, but for a few minutes only. He had thought to comfort Catherine? A gulf lay between them, the gulf of his guilty consciousness. He shunned her eye, he shrank from her touch, there was torture to him in her very presence; and yet a torture that he went to meet, for it seemed all that was left to him of life. Who shall say how he spent the intervening hours in his desolate house? The door was closed, the blind drawn over the little window; within, a man now shaken by paroxysms of remorse and grief, now sitting for hours with a numbed consciousness that had more of stupor in it than of pain. The dreaminess habitual with Caleb became part of his torment now. Torn from it with violence, forced to face and to recognise the inexorable truth, each

lapse into oblivion that relieved him for the time made each new awakening more terrible. Yet through it all Caleb was blessed in this, that those years of unselfish love to Catherine were with him still. Yes, it was his love for Catherine that roused him again and again, that braced him to go forth in his misery and meet the world like a man. He did not know it; his past life seemed to himself to have been burnt up for ever, to have fallen in ashes in the devouring flame of that fatal hour. But past righteousness, like past evil, lives on. It was Caleb's salvation now.

Old Franklin had had a relapse on hearing the news of his son's death, which could not long be kept from him, and lay in a precarious state; but all the village, which had known Will from boyhood, followed him to the grave on Sunday afternoon. Catherine was there, though women in

those days rarely attended funerals. It was her will to go. And Caleb was there also. Wrung with remorse and helpless sorrow, he had yet to stand as chief mourner at his nephew's grave.

When Caleb first understood what was expected of him, he acquiesced indeed, but to himself he said he could not do it; the horrible irony of the situation worked on his imagination beforehand; he could not do it. But when the time came, a deadness of feeling fell on him, and loss of realisation that not unfrequently come to help mortals in the supreme crises of life. Will's death was ever present with him, yet now it seemed long ages ago; and this dismal ceremony of to-day, in which so many had part, hardly associated itself in his mind with that tragic moment known to himself alone. It was his secret that oppressed him, the sense of separation from his fellow-kind through the know-

ledge hidden in his own breast. How strange that he alone among them all should know—surely they too must know. The desire to proclaim the truth aloud, to have done for ever with this intolerable weight of sin and of isolation, grew on him from minute to minute. For the burden of sin lies in that sense of isolation from God and from man, in the awful loneliness in which the sinner is set apart.

In the midst of his friendly neighbours pressing round, Caleb stood an outcast, and he knew it. Only at the last, catching sight of Catherine's face as she stood looking down into the grave, an overwhelming pang of misery drove out every other thought. Down there, alas, hidden away from sight, unfriended and alone, lay the strong young life that had loved life and love so well.

The day was wet; but as the people left the little graveyard and dispersed, the

clouds began to lift. The people dispersed talking, along the roads to their own homes; whilst Caleb with Catherine at his side pursued his silent way up to the Hill Farm. The rain had ceased by the time they reached the top of the lane and passed through the farm-gate; and beyond the world of clouds and mists, and of wet fields and meadows they looked out to where a streak of sunshine was lighting up the distant hills. Caleb paused before entering the house.

'See yonder, Cathy,' he said with the anxious tenderness that like an incessant pleading cry, was in his voice always now when he spoke to her, 'the sun's beginning to shine. We shall have a fine evening after all, maybe.'

'I wish the sun 'ud never shine again,' said Catherine heavily, turning from him with wrung hands.

Caleb stood silent in this anguish of

seeing her anguish that no word of his could lighten. Presently Catherine came back to his side.

'I've been thinking what I shall do, godfather,' she said, 'and I've decided to go down this evening to Franklin's farm. He's got no one to nurse him but the farm-servants, and I'll be as good a daughter to him as I know how.'

'As you will, Cathy,' said Caleb, in a low voice. She was drifting further and further from him; well, he could stretch out no hand to hold her.

'I've heard of some one to take old Martin's place for the present,' Catherine went on, 'and Mrs. Matthews 'll take care to keep the house in order. Later on, maybe, I'll know better what to do. I can't think now; everything seems broken and confused.'

Caleb did not answer. He stood looking out on the landscape, which in the

misty shifting light had in its wide expanse something of the immensity and vagueness of the sea; suggesting too, like the sea, an infinity of possibilities beyond. And as he looked, a new thought came into his mind; but one that fitted in so well with some former thoughts, that it became at once a fixed resolution.

'You'll not be wanting me any more now, Cathy,' he said, 'and that's well, for I'm going away too.'

'You, godfather,' said Catherine, startled; 'for long, do you mean?'

'Ay,' he said, 'for a long time, and a long way off. I'm going abroad, Cathy. My life's broken up too; I've nothing more to do with Haysted; and I've a fancy to see some o' those places again that your father and me was at together in the year '15. I shall be off as soon as may be; and you'll write to me sometimes, my lass, and tell me how you're getting on.'

Caleb spoke in a low voice, but with composure. Catherine did not at once answer, but stood at a little distance from Caleb, looking at him with straining eyes, that gradually softened into something of their old tenderness.

'Godfather,' she said gently, but without approaching him, 'you're not fit to go; you're ill now with all this trouble, and you might get worse in foreign parts with none to help you but strangers. Why should you leave us all? Or, if you'd rather be away for awhile, let me go with you and take care of you.'

Caleb shook his head.

'Nay,' he said, 'you must stay and look after Franklin. You're in the right there, my lass. He'll need somebody now, and I've no right to stand in his way. And you'll be happier without me, Cathy. I should only darken your life if I stayed.'

'Nothing could do that,' she answered, 'all is dark already. Everyone is going away from me—even you, godfather.'

She stood gazing before her with a hopeless misery in her eyes, but attempted no further remonstrance. Caleb took one or two turns up and down, then came and stood in front of her.

'Cathy,' he said, in a broken voice, 'if I could do aught to comfort or help you, God knows . . . . God knows, my lass, whether I'd do it. It breaks my heart to see your sorrow . . . you as ought to ha' been, and might ha' been, so happy. But I'm not what I was, and I should darken your life—God is merciful to such as you, Cathy—I trust in God that he's merciful to an innocent sorrow like yours . . . and by-and-by, when you come to see it, I won't be there to come between Him and you again, maybe.'

Caleb's voice sank till the last words were almost inaudible. He took Cathe-

rine's hand as once before, and stood looking at her with an inexpressible yearning in his eyes. 'God bless thee, Catherine,' he said; and was gone.

Catherine started and moved forward a step or two. 'Godfather!' she cried. But Caleb was gone.

PART III.

TEN years later, a figure strange to Haysted was seen making its way along the village street, towards the close of an autumn day. In the failing light it could be distinguished only as that of a thin old man very much bent, who walked feebly, pausing now and again and leaning on his stick, as though to rest. A lad standing at one of the cottage doors reported that he had seen that same figure in the afternoon crossing the fields in the direction of the Hill Farm. He knew him again, he said, by the queer cut of his hat and

coat, the like of which he had never seen before; and he took him to be a foreigner, for he had a knapsack on his back and looked as if he had walked a long distance. So said the lad, and his listeners heard with doubt and some suspicion; for what should bring a foreigner to Haysted? The children were all at their supper or being put to bed; else the stranger might have had a troop of them at his heels as he passed along the street in the direction of the Vicarage. As it was, only a cur flew out and barked at him.

Caleb Field looked strange to Haysted, for in these years his dress and outward appearance had conformed itself with that of his neighbours in the little Belgian village where he had been living and working. But Haysted had no strangeness for him, beyond the strangeness that attends a rush of familiar associations on

a mind grown apart from its old self. He paused now and then, but it was less for the sake of rest—though of that he stood sorely in need—than to satisfy his passionate thirst to look again upon the objects dear to him from infancy; to take in, even in the twilight, the familiar outline and colouring of the brown walls and red roofs, the trees yellowing and strewing their leaves before the autumn blast, the old church-tower grey against the grey background of the misty autumn sky. Once he retraced his steps and stood motionless for a while; it was before the little window jutting out into the street, the window of his home, where he had been used to sit and work. A light shone behind the red curtain; even as he looked, the house-door burst open and two boys with shouts of glee came tumbling out, and stood to stare mutely at the stranger until a woman's

shrill voice recalled them. The door slammed to; then the curtain was withdrawn for a moment, a face looked out, the well-known interior was revealed. The two boys were settling themselves noisily at the supper-table; the table still stood in the centre of the room; a fire burned on the little hearth and shone warmly on the whitewashed walls. But neither hearth nor table held a welcome for Caleb now. God! to what a lost world it all belonged. With one of those pangs that anticipate death, he turned away, and paused no more till he reached the Vicarage.

He gave his name, and was shown into the Vicar's study. A little, soft-haired girl, the pet granddaughter of the house, was building bricks in one corner; she gazed with wide-open eyes and ran out of the room, frightened by the strange old man who looked at her with a pathos she

could not understand from beneath his white eyebrows. In a few minutes the door opened again, and the Vicar himself appeared. He also had aged, had grown a little bent and withered in these last ten years; but he looked hale, ruddy, and erect by the side of the broken-down man who rose at his entrance.

'Sit down, sit down,' said the Vicar, compassionately, shaking hands with him, 'I am glad to see you again in these parts, Caleb. I have heard of you from time to time through your goddaughter, Catherine Bligh, and I was afraid you had given up Haysted altogether—— But you look ill, Caleb; the journey has been too much for you, I fear.'

'Ay, sir, I'm very ill,' Caleb answered, 'I haven't long to live. The doctor told me that before I left, and that's how I come to be here to-day. For there's something I must say before I die, and I'd

sooner say it, sir, to you whom I've known most o' my life, than to a stranger.'

'You must have something to eat first, Caleb,' said the Vicar, rising to ring the bell, 'you look quite exhausted. I will order some supper to be sent in here.'

'No, sir, thank you kindly,' said Caleb, 'I couldn't eat anything, and I had a cup o' tea up at the Hill Farm; Catherine saw to that. I'm strong enough for what I have to say.'

Caleb's voice in fact, though low, was calm, and his manner collected. He waited a minute while the Vicar seated himself again; then he began.

'You remember, sir,' he said, 'about this time—'twere in June, though—ten years ago, when I gave up the clerk's place and went away, right out o' Haysted?'

'Surely, Caleb,' the Vicar said, 'it was just after your nephew's death. That was a great shock to you, I remember.'

'Ay—a very great shock,' Caleb answered, 'and you'll remember, sir, about the lad's death, how everyone thought it was an accident?'

'Surely, Caleb,' the Vicar said again, 'it was an accident, and a very sad one. It is not forgotten in Haysted, I can assure you. I never knew a finer nor more promising young man.'

'He was, he was,' said Caleb. His head dropped for a moment. 'I think sometimes,' he went on, in a lower voice, 'what he'd ha' been by this time if he'd lived; there's nothing can ever make up for that —nothing. And it warn't an accident . . I could never tell before; thank God, I can tell it now. 'Twas me that did it, and have had the lad's death heavy on my soul this ten year past.'

'You, Caleb,' said the Vicar, startled, but incredulous. He thought his old clerk the victim of some morbid delusion; such a

case had come within his experience before. Caleb answered the tone, if he failed to detect the thought.

'I did it,' he said, solemnly. He drew a long breath and sat silent a while, his hands spread out on his knees, his eyes fixed on the ground. 'I was fond o' Will always,' he went on, presently, 'and if he'd come by his death as you, sir, and all the neighbours thought, I should ha' mourned the lad sore. But that wouldn't have drove me away from my home and my work and all that I loved best, to go and live among strangers—not but what they was kind to me, very kind.'

Caleb's head dropped again, and again he was silent for a moment.

'No,' he went on; 'there was worse than that, there was worse. It all happened ten years ago, and there's not been a day hardly since then that I haven't gone over it in my mind. I'd been sleep-

ing up at the Hill Farm—for I had to meet the coach to L—— in the morning —and as luck would have it, I took the path by the old sand-pit. Presently, I see Will coming along; and we stopped and had some talk. No matter now what it was about; but something the lad said angered me. He were hot-tempered, and I was an old fool, and so we had words together. He had a bit of a stick in his hand, and he shifted it, so; and I thought he were going to strike me. I don't believe now he'd ha' done such a thing; but I thought it then, in my anger, and seized him by the collar and flung him away. His foot slipped, and he went off that narrow bit o' pathway there, over into the sand-pit. When I got down to him, I found that he were dead.'

Caleb paused. The Vicar, with conviction growing in his mind, said nothing, but waited for him to speak again.

'He were dead,' Caleb repeated. 'No matter how I felt . . . But I had no thought o' concealment then, sir—not till I thought of Cathy. I knew that she and Will cared for each other, and I thought to myself, the lass'll be heart-broken enough when she hears that her lover is dead; but when she knows that it's me, her old daddy—for that's how she always thought o' me—as has done it, it will kill her outright. So I made up my mind that I'd say nothing, and try to be a comfort to her, as had no other comfort left—but it were no good—there was always something as came between us—and she felt it too, I know she did, though she didn't know what it was.'

Caleb ceased speaking, and sat with his hand shading his eyes. The Vicar too was silent for a moment.

'Your revelation has been so startling and unexpected, Caleb,' he said at last;

'it has taken me so completely by surprise, that I hardly know with what words to meet it. How far you were guilty in intention of your nephew's death, you alone can tell; but of this I feel sure, that it is only through such a confession as you have made to-night, that you can find true comfort and peace.'

'Comfort and peace,' repeated Caleb, slowly. 'If it had been them as I was thinking of, I might ha' told the whole truth years ago, as I've longed to do many a time, so as none can tell but them as has had a sin lying hidden and heavy on their soul. And I won't be deceiving you now, sir. I ain't come here with any notion o' delivering myself up to justice. I don't know what the law 'ud do to me; but if I hadn't known that I haven't enough life left in me for it to take hold of, I shouldn't be here to-night. I'd no more bring sorrow and disgrace into my

Cathy's life now than I would ten years ago. No, it ain't that; it's that I want you, sir, to tell my Catherine the whole story when I'm dead and gone, and when it won't grieve her too much. You'll tell her, sir, so that it won't grieve her too much .... you'll tell her, but she'll know that well enough, there's been never a moment since, that I wouldn't ha' given my life for the lad's, if that could ha' been. But I couldn't bear, if we should ever chance to meet in the next world, to know there's that between us still, or that she should think I went to my grave meaning to deceive her. If you'll tell her all, sir, she'll forgive me—I know she'll forgive me.'

'My poor fellow—' began the Vicar; but Caleb went on, in a voice that for the first time became high and tremulous.

'Perhaps I've been all wrong, sir—perhaps I've held myself to be o' too much account; but that's been my feeling.

When I went away ten years ago, I thought I'd ruined her life as it was; but I might ha' known better than that—I might ha' known my Cathy better. She's the sort of woman as would turn her life to good, whatever happened. I heard from her, sir; she wrote to me often. She told me as how she'd brought old Franklin home to live with her at the Hill Farm, and how, when he died, she'd taken in first one little orphan, and then another, till she'd made a home for little things as had no other home to look to. And she said to me to-day, "Godfather," she said, "that time you went away I was nigh crazed, I think, and there was nought but blackness before me. But I see now how I was wrong and where I was wrong." When she said that, sir, I knew I hadn't done her all the harm I might ha' done. Only as I came away, and saw her standing in the gate with the

little 'uns all about her, and one clinging to her neck, I knew—I knew that I'd cut her off——'

Caleb's voice broke and died away; he sank back in his chair exhausted. The Vicar rose and rang the bell.

'You are tired out, Caleb,' he said; 'we will talk no more to-night. You will sleep here, and to-morrow you can say anything further you may wish, and I will give you what help I can.'

'Thank you kindly, sir,' Caleb said, 'and for listening to me as you have done. I don't know as I've much more to say—only that you should repeat it all to Catherine.'

He sat motionless, whilst the Vicar left the room. Presently returning, he showed Caleb up into a little white bedroom, where for that night he could sleep in peace. An arm-chair stood by the bedside; before it was a small table with a candle. Caleb sat down wearily in

the arm-chair, leaning forward on to the table. The Vicar lingered before leaving the room. In his first surprise and perplexity, he had perhaps not said all that he might.

'My poor fellow,' he said again, 'I cannot doubt that your repentance is sincere; all that you have said to-night proves it. But if any words of mine can help you—or, better still, you will find here words that cannot fail——' He placed his hand as he spoke on a Bible that lay on the table.

Caleb looked up.

'Thank you, sir,' he said; 'I won't say but I've come to read my Bible again in these last years; but it seems to me somehow as if it weren't for me to speak about it—as if what I'd found there lay between God and myself.'

He said no more, and the Vicar went away. The next morning, when he followed a

servant into the room, he found that Caleb had slightly altered his position. He was leaning back in the arm-chair now, his head resting on the cushion; the candle had burnt down to its socket, and the bed was unslept in. Caleb was dead.

It all happened nearly sixty years ago. It is an old story now; only a tradition of the truth lingers in the village where the events took place. But three graves still rise side by side in a sunny corner of the little churchyard; and the same green and daisied coverlid that shelters Will and Catherine spreads itself over Caleb. Side by side they lie together; for so Catherine willed it.

IN AN INN GARDEN.

IN AN INN GARDEN.

'That time,—O times!—'

—'I REMEMBER the girl as if I had seen her yesterday,' said Madame Sophie R——. 'I do not know her history; I have never seen her again. But what I do know, I will relate to you, since you wish to hear it:—

Not far from the city of L—— lies a little inn garden by a river. It is now some years since circumstances obliged me to spend a twelvemonth in L——. I am not used to the life of a great city. I found

little in it to please me; and it was with delight that I one day accidentally discovered this garden, to which I could go with so much ease that I henceforward found myself in it again and again. A quarter-of-an-hour by train brought me to a small station, at which I alighted. A brief space of dusty high-road then lay before me, still bearing traces of the adjacent city in mean houses, in ragged wayside weeds whitened by the dust or splashed by the mud raised by a hundred carts and waggons that daily lumbered along to the city gates, in frequent wine-shops and a half-listless folk, in all the shabby life, lacking the characteristics of town and country alike, which clings about the outskirts of a great town. But a sudden turn led at once to a scene that had every charm which absolute peace among rural surroundings can give. A deep winding lane ended in a quiet little inn set between poplars and green hedges.

Cocks and hens were for ever pecking about the grass-grown threshold of the open door, or straying into the passage that ran through the house; ducks quacked and straggled to and from a shallow pond; pigeons cooed; the deep resonant bark of a chained house-dog announced every newcomer. An atmosphere of homely country life, in short, lay about the place; it seemed to me that I had come upon a paradise of peace and sunshine and quiet, when I first discovered the little inn in its sheltered nook. A trellised vine was trained above the door in front, and behind the house lay the garden of which I have spoken. It was a long strip of ground shut in on either side by high bushy hedges and rustling poplars. There was no turf, and hardly any flowers brightened the uniform green; only a few straggling roses, a few bushes of rosemary set in some plots of thrifty vegetables near the house. Lower

down, green vine-covered berceaux afforded a cool shelter from the sun; and at the extreme end of the garden, divided from it only by a low ivy-grown wooden palisade, ran a river which gave the whole place its character and its charm. It was not a wide or rapid river: on the contrary, it was a gentle stream, so narrow that every wild flower growing among the deep grass in the opposite meadow could be seen from the garden; so quiet, that its unruffled surface had almost the glassy surface of a pool, and its clear depths reflected each tree and bush, each blade in the fringe of grass that overhung it from the high banks, each leaf of the water-plants its tranquil current hardly stirred. Above and below the little inn the river made a bend; willows and elms closed in the prospect, and added the charm of the mysterious beyond to the deep seclusion of the scene. Immediately opposite the garden lay a

breadth of verdant meadow-land shut in by rising ground behind, by trees on either side; red and white cows sometimes wandered there, or came down to where a break in the overhanging bank had allowed a muddy path to be trodden to the river's edge. For sunlight and shadow, for peace and the suggestions of peace, for coolness and verdure, and silence unruffled except by the inarticulate murmur of ripple and birds, I know of no spot to equal my little river garden.

And I describe it minutely, for it is inseparably connected in my mind with the girl whom I saw there for the first and last time.

I visited it often through that long hot summer; I made friends with the hostess; I sometimes dined there and sat through long afternoons, reading and writing at one of the green tables set about in shady corners. I even thought at one time of

leaving the city altogether during those sultry months, and of establishing myself at my little inn; a fresh white curtain swaying to and fro in an upper casement seemed to promise an equally fresh interior; a cool retreat with a verdant prospect of trees and green-shadowed water. But on reflection I gave up this idea. I feared to miss part of the charm of my garden in becoming familiar with it, in losing the sense of contrast between the hot roads and its leafy freshness, in bringing the dusty cares of every-day life to desecrate this tranquil nook. One grows an epicure in these matters, as one grows old; a naïve pleasure, a fresh impression becomes a treasure to be hoarded, not recklessly used or flung aside after the careless fashion of youth. Therefore I resolved to stay in the city; and I was confirmed in this resolution by a certain Sunday afternoon excursion that I made

to the little inn. Alighting from a crowded train and issuing from the station, I found the road lively with carts and public vehicles filled with young men and city maidens; and long before I reached my garden, the sound of loud voices, of song and laughter, warned me of what I should find. I looked and fled. I did not grudge them the garden, Heaven knows. It was I who was out of place. But, since it was quiet I had come to seek, I fled.

It was more than a week before I went again. I arrived early and found, as was not unfrequently the case, that I had the garden to myself. It was drawing towards the end of the summer, and the mellow sunlight, the sense of ripeness in the air, gave, as I remember, something more of repose to the quiet spot. I seated myself in my favourite corner; the hostess happened to be absent, but the little maid

served me my usual noonday meal of coffee and eggs. I arranged my books and writing materials on the little table before me and on the bench at my side, and was looking forward to a long and peaceful afternoon, when two new-comers entered the garden and arrested my attention.

At the first glance, indeed, I took them to be merely such a bourgeois couple as sometimes strayed in there to breakfast; but a closer observation made me change my opinion. The man who was tall, fair, and handsome, was no bourgeois. His hands, in one of which he carried a pair of dog-skin gloves, were white, with carefully kept nails, and a plain seal ring on one finger; his coat was well cut; he had an air of ease and good society. The girl, who was quite young, wore a neat pink cotton gown, rather faded in the wash, with a white muslin bow carefully tied under her linen collar; on her head,

when she entered the garden, was a little white net bonnet with pink ribbon strings, a trifle faded like her gown; but this she at once removed and hung up on the branch of a tree, showing some thick twists of dark hair. She was slight, and she was also pretty, but more through colouring and expression perhaps, than through feature; her cheeks had a charming natural bloom, set off by her pink gown; her eyes, which were small rather than large, shone with a brilliant fitful light under their dark lashes; she had a determined, almost stubborn-looking mouth and chin, and not at all a classic nose. Her hands, which were gloveless, were pale and smooth as those of city girls used to a sedentary life are wont to be, but neither well-shaped nor well-kept: on one finger she wore a cheap coral ring.

They had given their orders apparently on their way through the house, and sat

down at one of the little green tables to await the arrival of their meal. My presence did not seem to disturb them in the least; though as they had placed themselves just opposite me, I was near enough to hear every word they said. Their conversation, in fact, was unintelligible to me, as it turned almost exclusively on persons and incidents well-known to both, with rapid passing allusions to one thing and another. It was the girl who talked most; leaning forward a little, her arms folded on the table, she spoke with great vivacity; whilst her companion lounging back in his chair, with his hands in his pockets, responded by an occasional word and nod. Now and then she sprang up and mimicked a gesture, a step, a movement; then reseating herself, talked on as before. The restless gaiety of her manner, in which there was no affectation and which yet seemed to me not altogether

natural, contrasted with the immobility of her companion. She laughed a good deal, whilst he hardly took the trouble to smile. All the effort and exertion of the conversation were on her side.

She paused at last in her eager talk, and sat silent for a moment leaning back in her chair, her hands clasped behind her head, her bright eyes gazing before her: then jumping up, she began to flit about the garden with the half-springing step and inconsequent movements of a child. Espying a solitary flower on a climbing rose, one of the few roses which the garden produced, she sprang to get it and failed; it hung too high overhead. She desisted after one or two attempts, and the man, who had been watching her, slowly rose and went to the spot. He was tall, as I have said, more than a head taller than she was, and reached it without difficulty.

'Here is your rose,' he said, holding it towards her.

She did not at once take the flower. She had torn her finger with a thorn and was holding it in her mouth. 'Give me your handkerchief,' she said in a moment.

He drew a handkerchief from his pocket and gave it to her. It was a cambric one, with an initial embroidered in one corner. The girl took it; then using her teeth as scissors, she cut the edge of the hem, tore off a long strip that included the initial, and wound it round her finger.

'There!' she cried, in a joyous voice. 'Whoever embroidered that for you, will never have her work used by you again.'

'I have not an idea who worked it,' he answered. 'You, perhaps. One buys them by the dozen.'

'I don't do embroidery,' she said, rather curtly. She took the rose from his hand. 'This is mine?' she said. 'Well, then, I

give it to you. It was for you I wanted it.'

She put it in his button-hole, and felt for a pin with which to fasten it securely, but could not find one. 'No matter,' she said, 'it will hold. Now promise me one thing—that you will keep it always.'

He looked down at the flower. 'Always? This rose?' he said. 'Do you know what a dead rose looks like? Like that'—picking one from the rose-tree. 'What on earth should I keep a thing like that for?'

She laughed. 'Well, give me that,' she said, snatching the dead rose from his hand and thrusting it inside her frock. 'Now, we've each got one; and if I keep mine, you might keep yours.'

'I don't in the least want you to keep it,' he answered; 'but do if you like. You're always rather sentimental, you know.'

'I'm not: you know I'm not,' she cried. 'But I suppose one may have feelings.'

'No, don't,' he said, walking away towards the table again. This scene had passed so close to me, that I had inevitably heard every word that was spoken; and now, as her companion turned his back on her, I saw a look of anguish that momentarily whitened her cheeks come into the girl's face. She stood motionless, her brows drawn together, her fingers tightly interlaced, struggling apparently to master some strong passion or emotion. She succeeded. In another moment the blood came rushing back, her fingers unlocked; with a snatch of song, and the same gay springing step as before, she ran up the garden to meet the white-capped maid who was advancing with a tray.

'Here is our breakfast,' she cried. 'And I am hungry. What have you ordered?

Chocolate, I hope, and galette and an omelette.'

They sat down together just within the shadow of one of the vine-covered berceaux, precisely opposite to where I still kept my seat and my book. Between us lay only the garden path, flooded by the hot mid-day sun. The girl interested me, and as it was they who had chosen their position I found no indiscretion in keeping the seat I had previously held. Their repast lasted a long time. I observed, however, that, whilst her companion made an excellent meal, the girl, who had declared herself hungry, touched hardly anything. The delicacies she had desired, appeared, and she allowed herself to be helped from each dish in turn; but she employed herself in feeding a cat and dog belonging to the inn, who had come and seated themselves, one on either side of her. Her gay mood had changed a little; she talked less and looked

more at her companion, who did not look much at her, but rather at the plates and dishes before him.

'We are extremely dull,' he said at last, taking out his watch, 'and we may have to spend an hour yet in this hot little hole of a garden. I shall go and order some champagne.'

He rose as he spoke and walked away towards the inn. The rose, loosely fastened in his button-hole, fell out as he moved. He did not notice it, but the girl did. She picked it up, pressed it with a passionate gesture to her lips, then thrust it hurriedly inside the bosom of her frock, pressing both hands tightly over it with an energy that brought the varying colour to her cheek with a rush. When her companion returned, she was idly tracing a design with her forefinger in some spilt red wine on the green table. He glanced down at his coat.

'Where is my rose?' he said.

'Have you lost it?' she answered, without looking up.

'I suppose so—I had it a moment ago.'

He looked down and about him on the dusty ground. She also stirred slightly, and with the point of her shoe moved aside the leaves that clustered at the foot of the vine trellis. He resigned himself.

'You will have to get me another,' he said.

'Never,' she answered, leaning back in her chair with folded arms, and looking at him with a smile at once defiant and provoking. 'I will never give you a rose again.'

He shrugged his shoulders slightly. 'As you will,' he said; 'I shall not die for want of a rose.'

She looked at him for a moment in silence. 'Die!' she said then. 'I believe you will never die, unless it be of old age.'

'Thank you for the prophecy,' he said, laughing, 'and may you prove a true prophet. Here; let us drink to your old age and mine.'

The champagne had been brought; he filled a glass and passed it to her. She just touched it with her lips; then springing to her feet, held it aloft, whilst in a clear untaught voice she sang a drinking song, which an opera recently the fashion had made popular. Her companion, who was smoking, joined in the chorus with a lazy hum, watching the while, with half-closed eyes, the rings of smoke that he puffed into the air. She sang the song through; at the end, whether by accident or intention, I do not know, the glass fell crashing to the ground.

'Bravo! bravo!' said her companion. 'Excellently well sung! But you have lost your wine.'

He pushed his own glass towards her

as he spoke. She took no notice of it, but dropping into her chair, sat with her elbows on the table, her chin propped on her hands, gazing before her into vacancy.

'Do you know what I should like better than anything in the world?' she said, suddenly turning to her companion.

'What?' he answered.

'To go once, only just once, to a box at the opera.'

'Well, I will take you,' he said.

'You will?' she cried, eagerly. 'Oh, when?'

'To-morrow night.'

She sprang to her feet again, clapping her hands. 'To-morrow night—do you mean really to-morrow night?'

'Certainly I mean it,' he said. 'I will take a box to-morrow, and call for you in the evening.'

She stood looking at him, her hands

clasped as though in ecstasy. All at once a shade stole over her face.

'This dress,' she said, looking down at it and lifting a frill, 'it will not do—and it is the only one I have.'

'Oh, it will do well enough,' he answered, carelessly; 'put a flower in your hair. You always look charming, you know.'

'But I want to go to a large box,' she said, her eyes widening a little with a look of anxiety, 'in the centre of the house, where I can see every one and be seen.'

'Yes, yes, I understand; but you will do very well. You can put a rose in your hair.'

'The dead rose,' she said, with a laugh.

'What do you mean?' he said, frowning a little.

'Oh, nothing,' she answered; 'see, here is some one come to speak to you.'

She turned quickly round as she spoke the last words, and stood with her back to

him, her hand pressed tightly on her heart. The little inn-maid had approached once more to tell the gentleman that his horse and servant had arrived and were waiting.

'I must go,' he said, with a certain alacrity. He paid the bill that the maid had brought, and rose.

'You don't mind staying here alone till the train goes?' he said, as he buttoned up his coat and drew on his gloves.

'Not in the least—oh, not in the least,' she answered; 'it is only half-an-hour, you know.'

'Then I will be off at once. I have no time to lose.'

He took up his hat, but still lingered a moment, as though he hesitated to say some final word. It was she who spoke it.

'Till to-morrow evening, then,' she cried, in her clear, childish voice. 'You will call for me?'

'Yes, yes; that is it,' he said, with an air of relief, and putting on his hat. 'I will call for you.'

They walked up the path together—she, with her springing steps, at his side. About half-way up the garden she paused, and without any formal farewell apparently, allowed him to go on alone, whilst she stood, one hand shading her eyes, the other pressed on her heart, in a way that seemed habitual with her. He walked on up to the inn, but before entering it, turned and looked back. Instantly the girl started from her attitude, waving and kissing both hands in a sort of joyous adieu, till he had turned again and passed out of sight. One minute longer she stood, whilst a sound of horses' hoofs could be heard retreating up the lane, fainter and fainter in the distance. Then she turned. Gropingly, as though blinded by the sunlight, she made her way to the table again,

and fell back in a chair as though she had been shot.

I thought she had swooned, so colourless was her face, so motionless her closed eyelids and loose hanging hands. I went up to her, and raised her head, which had fallen back against the wooden framework of the berceau. She had not fainted, for she roused herself at the touch and sat up, leaning forward, her head and chin raised a little, her arms straight and rigid, her hands tightly clasped, like one in a paroxysm of anguish.

'Oh, I can't bear it—I can't bear it——' she said, as if the words were wrung from her.

'You are suffering. Can I not help you?' I said, trying to take one of her cold hands in mine. But she resisted the attempt, though I believe she was hardly conscious of my presence.

'Oh, I can't bear it——' she repeated,

with a moan, and sat motionless for a moment, gazing before her with blank eyes. Suddenly she started to her feet, and made a step or two forward in the direction of the house; but her strength failed. She caught at the table to support herself, and sank back again in the chair with the same deathlike pallor as before. Unable to guess the cause of her misery, I could yet divine by her utter prostration now what the last hour must have cost her. The wine still stood on the table. I poured out a glass, and held it to her lips. She tasted it, then sat up, and drank it eagerly. It revived her, if only to a keener anguish; it gave her the power and the will to speak.

'I never wished him good-bye,' she said, in heart-broken accents. 'I might have said one word; and now it is too late. I shall never see him again.'

She wrung her hands in bitter regret or

self-reproach. No one could see a fellow-creature held by such mortal anguish as hers, without striving to find the clue to it.

'Who is it you will never see again?' I said. 'Not your friend who has just left you? Is he not to take you to the opera to-morrow night?'

'Oh, the opera——' she said, clasping and unclasping her fingers. 'He was so anxious to deceive me, he forgot. There is no opera now.'

It was true, though I also had forgotten it. There was no opera at that season. In a moment she began to speak again, rapidly and excitedly.

'He thought to deceive me, but I deceived him,' she said. 'He could never have guessed that I knew. He would have hated me, if I had made a scene. He used to like me, he said, because I was always bright; and he will remember me

bright. I was just the same to him to the very last, though I knew I should never see him again.'

She paused. Even then, though her words were addressed to me, I doubt if she were fully conscious of my presence. She never once looked at me, or turned her eyes in my direction.

'How did you know?' I asked her at last.

'I was told,' she said, more absently; 'and I inquired, and found it was true. When he asked me to come here to-day, I knew it was for the last time, and knowing what I did, his manner told it me too. We have often been here,' she went on, a little wildly, looking round her. 'This frock—it was new the first time we came—and he said he liked it better than any dress he had ever seen.' She started to her feet again, both hands pressed with the familiar gesture on her heart. 'Oh,

I can't bear it—I can't bear it!' she cried.

We were interrupted. 'Lisa, I have come!' cried a voice from the upper end of the garden.

A young woman, poorly clad in a dingy brown gown and shawl, came running towards us with outstretched hands.

'Is he gone?' she cried, breathlessly.

I do not know what moved the girl. Was it the outspoken question acting like a visible presentment of her woe, or the familiar apparition of her friend recalling too vividly the dusty gloom of the work-a-day life to which she was about to return? For one moment she stood looking at her with startled eyes; the next, with one swift rush she had reached the end of the garden, had cleared the low palisade, and sprung into the river. So swift was her movement that we heard the splash and noted the meeting waves, whilst still too

stiffened with horror to move from the spot.

She was rescued instantly. Just below the garden a little wooden platform, supported by piles driven into the bank, projected into the stream, and made a mooring-place for a boat. The boatman, a strong-built, elderly man, was there, preparing to loosen his little bark. He heard the plunge. As the girl rose, he caught at her dress with his hook, and with his sturdy arms lifted her out of the water. Almost by the time we had reached the bottom of the garden, she was standing beside us again in the sunny path, dazed, dripping, half-stunned, but otherwise not the worse. She stood still in the centre of the path, and looked down at her mud-stained frock.

'It is a good thing it will wash,' she said in a minute, with a laugh.

Her friend put her arm in hers and

tried to draw her towards the inn; but she resisted, and freed herself from the grasp. She stood shivering in the bright sunshine, pushing back her long hair, loosened and streaming with wet, from her face. The man, with a shrug of his shoulders, had gone back to his boat. No alarm had reached the house; we three were alone. All at once the girl dropped on to a bench close by, and broke into an agony of weeping. Five minutes before, I doubt if she could have shed a tear; now the cold, the clinging wet of her garments, the physical wretchedness and discomfort, had touched a lower chord of misery, and she wept aloud, convulsively, rocking herself to and fro with despairing, heart-broken sobs. Her friend, meanwhile, stood beside her. She was a pallid, rather sullen-looking young woman, with a worn face. She did not speak, but put her arm round the younger girl, who

turned presently and hid her face against her friend. In another minute she rose, and suffered herself to be led away to the house.

I followed them, but only to desire the maid to see to their comfort and give them anything they might need. Then I returned to my afternoon's work. I cannot say I did much. Shaken and startled by the scene I had just witnessed, my thoughts were with the girl who had roused in me an interest so sudden and so deep. I did not go to her. Involuntarily I had been an intruder in a tragic hour of her life; the recognition that the intrusion had not been unwelcome lay with her; and with her friend at hand I knew she would not feel herself helpless or deserted. Still I was unwilling to go away without seeing her once more. The hours passed: the girl's bonnet still hung on the tree where she had tied it in the morning, and

by this sign I knew that she and her companion had not yet left the inn. Towards evening, when I was preparing to take my departure, the bonnet was fetched; and returning to the house, I met the two in the passage, and found that they proposed returning to the city by the same train as myself. The girl looked pale and languid and disinclined to speak. The pink cotton was clean and dry again, her dark hair was neatly coiled; but the pretty colour was gone from her cheeks, the light had died out of her eyes; her frock hung about her in limp folds, and the crisp white muslin bow, which had given the last touch to her dress, had disappeared. All the freshness was gone from her toilette of the morning as it was gone from herself.

Her friend, I fancied, kept a sort of jealous guard over her, and we travelled back to the city in different carriages.

But on arriving I sought her out before leaving the station. The interest she had awakened in me was too keen for me to let her go without some parting word.

'Will you come,' I said, 'and see me, or may I come and see you? I should like to know something of you, to hear how you are.'

She looked at me in silence.

'No,' she said at last, shaking her head, 'your life lies there—mine here,'—pointing with her two hands; 'we have nothing more to do with each other.'

The words were defiant; but her voice and the look in her eyes were not. The next moment she had disappeared with her friend in the crowd. I have never seen her since.

It was long before I re-visited my river garden. A desecrating breath had passed over its green berceaux, a life-tragedy had

troubled the peace of its limpid waters. It was already autumn when I saw it again; the paths were damp, the yellow vine-leaves were beginning to thin. The silent melancholy discouraged me—I went there no more.

AN ISLAND GRAVE.

AN ISLAND GRAVE.

'Sleep, sleep, happy child!
All creation slept and smiled.
Sleep, sleep, happy sleep,
While o'er thee doth mother weep.'
Songs of Innocence.

'Do you see that island yonder?' said our host. 'It holds a rather curious cave, that I am about to take you to visit; a cave with a history, too, for it served as a hiding-place in the last century, like so many of our odd nooks and corners in this part of the country.'

The country was the north-east coast of Scotland; and as he spoke, our boat parted us from the land. It was an abrupt and

rocky shore we left behind us, divided at the point at which we had started by a narrow glen running up into the hills. At the foot of the glen stood our host's ancestral home, an old stone tower, bare and lonely without, full of warmth and modern comfort within; about it lay a little garden, furnished with such few flowers and hardy shrubs as the bleak winds would permit to grow. But cold and bleakness alike seemed far withdrawn to some nether world on this summer afternoon. Before us and around spread a smooth expanse of sea, pulsing blue and waveless in the tranquil light, with white reflections from the high white clouds floating overhead. Far away, between us and the horizon, lay a dark group of rocks, towards one of which, larger than the rest and somewhat detached from them apparently, we were steering. It lay altogether apart, we presently found, as the boat propelled by strong rowers, shot swiftly onwards, and

the group changing its character, the rocks discover themselves as islets, not huddled together as they showed at a distance, but spread over a very considerable space of water. That larger island for which we were bound was of some size and very rugged and abrupt in appearance, rising almost to a point in the centre, and with rocky sides now falling sheer and bare to the water, now sloping more gently and covered with thin grass and hardy brushwood. Some sea-birds rose and clamoured at the sound of our oars and voices, lifting their heavy wings against the blue; otherwise all was still in the lonely place. It lay so lonely, rising there in the midst of the summer sea, it had an aspect so remote, that some tale of enchantment might have held it as its centre; a remoteness enhanced by those other lonely rocks which, washed by the same waves, visited by the same sunshine and air, lay eternally fixed, indifferent and apart. We rowed twice

round the island; the still sea hardly broke into a ripple round its rocky base, cleft, so far as we could discover, by neither creek nor cranny large enough to admit an oar. We rowed round twice; where, we inquired then, was the entrance to the cave of which we had been told.

Our host smiled as he answered. 'You might row round many times without discovering it,' he said. 'For more than a hundred years it was a secret kept by one family on this coast; the smugglers even never discovered it, and but few people, I believe, are acquainted with it now. One of my ancestors who fought at Culloden found a refuge here afterwards; and though there is no cause for secresy in these days, we have done what we could to keep the place free from idle sight-seers and pleasure-parties. Here we are, however.'

The boat stopped as he spoke at a point of rock where some happy combination of

soil and aspect had favoured the growth of a mass of brushwood hanging close to the water's edge, so that in high and stormy tides the lower branches must have been washed by the waves. Raising his oar, one of the boatmen pushed these aside, disclosing a fissure so narrow that only a few feet within the entrance the boat stuck fast; whilst a projecting angle seemed to close the mouth of the cave, producing from without the illusion of solid rock. Immediately within, however, the roof rose, a sandy floor sloped steeply upwards, and jumping from the boat, we found ourselves after a moment's groping, in one of those singular caverns that delight the visitor to rocky seas and shores. A dim twilight filled the place, such light as there was filtering apparently through some aperture above, for the air was sufficiently fresh; and one of the men lighting a lantern he had brought

with him, a central cave with a lofty roof was revealed, from which smaller caves branching off on either hand were lost in darkness. The island was so small that the whole can have been of no great extent; but as the light flashed here and there, showing now an opening, now an unknown depth of shadow, it looked as if it might be the entrance to Hades itself, a passage hall to the very centre of the earth. It seemed devoid of life; the sloping floor was strewn for a little distance from the entrance with drift and seaweed, but beyond it lay empty, above the reach, as one might judge, of the stormiest waves, trodden only by our recent footsteps. All the more conspicuous then in its presence, was the one object which told that human life had once been present there. It was a headstone somewhat sunk in the sand, that at the upper end of the cave marked a small mound protected, as one sometimes

sees a grave protected in country churchyards, by osier twigs bent across. The twigs were comparatively fresh; but the headstone was old, and discoloured even in that remote corner by sea air and spray. Our host held the lantern so that its light fell on the rudely-cut inscription, almost illegible now; an inscription of a few words only, and a date more than a century back. We stood for a moment in silence; a multiplied murmur from the faint washing of the waves outside was all the sound that reached us, the walls of the cave rose high into the darkness above. It was a great and solemn vault for one small resting-place of the dead.

'I have a sentiment about that little grave,' said our host, as we seated ourselves again in the boat, and made for the shore. 'It is a very small item in this tumultuous world, but we found its history in an old paper written by that same

ancestor of ours, Robert Stuart, who took refuge here after Culloden. He was a soldier of reputation, a scholar and a poet—I can't say much, though, for his poetry; we have a volume of it at home. He lived in the middle of the last century, you know, and though I should judge him to have been a man full of sensibility and imagination, he allowed himself to be too rigidly governed in his verse by the academic spirit of his age. This fragment of prose that we possess seems to me worth all his poems put together. I will read it to you this evening, if you like; it contains some account of his adventures hereabouts after Culloden, and may interest you now that you know the locality. My old tower there belonged to him; it came to me through a younger branch of the family, for he himself finally settled and died in France.'

That same evening our host read to us the paper of which he spoke. The begin-

ning had been torn away and lost, we found, and a few pages further on. The remainder was intact.

——When the morning broke, I was already well on my way towards home. My wound had been so carefully tended by those friendly people as to cause me little further inconvenience; and the clothes lent me by the farmer proved a sufficient disguise. I went on my way briskly in the keen morning air; and my inward dejection of spirit being visible to no man, none suspected that they saw in me a fugitive from that most melancholy and disastrous field. Alas! when I thought of my scattered comrades, of those who were prisoners, of those more fortunate who were dead, of our fugitive Prince and broken cause, a weight seemed to bow down my head; and had it not been for that dear soul who, with her baby at her

breast, was counting the hours with prayers for my return, it would have seemed little to me, I vow, to join hands with many a nobler man than myself who lay in fetters now. But for her dear sake, I could still return thanks to Heaven for life and freedom, and find courage to press on my way towards home. On the evening of the second day I arrived . . . . . .

Our abode at that time was a square stone house or tower on the coast, built by my grandfather and looking east over the sea, with a strip of garden, where only herbs and hardy shrubs would grow. I had sent my wife there at the beginning of the troubles, since through its remote situation and the loyal temper of the country round—loyal to the king and to our family alike—it was a safer residence for her than our estate near Stirling. The bay in which it stood was landlocked by cliffs on either side, and thus we were

less exposed to the elements than might otherwise have been the case. Nevertheless, it was but a stormy and wind-beaten spot, and often after my return, as Mary sat with the infant on her knee over the parlour fire, she would drop her work and raise her head to listen to the moan of the blast round the angles of the house. For she could never get over her terror of pursuit, and heard a signal-gun or the tramp of soldiers in every storm-gust and dash of rain. For myself, I had few fears, and beyond keeping strictly within the walls of the tower, used few precautions. The country-people, as I have said, were well-affected, though, through poverty and other causes, they had taken no part in the rising; nor were King George's soldiers (or so I thought) likely to visit so remote a spot, save through tidings reaching them of fugitives in hiding there. Therefore, I say, I had few fears, and lived

on with such occupation as I could find in my books, waiting always for news from France that might determine my going thither, since that was the scheme on which my mind was set. But as yet no news was come; nor could I learn the fate of my Prince; and this suspense I found harder to bear than any alarm that might visit me as to my own safety.

My wife however, fearing always, and finding me, I suppose, hard to arouse at that time in the matter (my mind being occupied with other things) could not rest until she had consulted with an old fisherman, David Maclean by name, who had a cottage and nets and boats down in the bay, and lived there with his son, a lad of fifteen or thereabouts. David had lived there always, and his father before him; nor could my wife and I count on each other more faithfully than on David's loyalty and service. He too, like myself,

began by bidding my wife have no fear, since not a man in all the country round who knew (and they were but one or two who did know) of my presence at the tower would betray me; and the search too, as he understood, was beginning to die out everywhere. But if the worst came to the worst, he went on to say, he knew a place where the laird could be hidden so that no one in the world, let alone King George's soldiers, need hope to find him. My wife inquiring eagerly what place, he pointed to two or three small islands that lay mistily on the horizon outside the bay. In one of these, he said, there was a cave whose entrance was so cunningly hidden by rocks and bushes that, except by one who knew of such a secret beforehand, its existence could hardly be discovered. He himself had found it out one day by accident, whilst looking for an oar that had dropped overboard and floated away; and feeling

sure from its appearance that the place had never been visited within the memory of man, had kept the secret to himself, thinking it might be useful one day in these troubled times. David Maclean had spoken to me of this before; but Mary, hearing of it now for the first time, began at once to beg David to take provisions there from time to time, as he could do it without being seen, together with peat and firewood and other necessaries. And that very day she began to collect and to send one thing and another, to be in readiness in case of need, she said, since at the last it might be too late to think of them. I laughed at her at the time, though I let her have her way; but was afterwards thankful to her indeed for her dear and careful forethought for our wants.

At last, however, as the days passed on, and I, except for my heaviness at the absence of news from over the water, and

at the woeful tidings of my friends that rumour brought me from time to time, remained tranquil, and as there was no word of pursuit in our corner of the country; my wife too, began to calm down and to be happy again in her babe, who was now more than six months old, and beginning to have smiles and clinging fingers, and many little cries and ways such as rejoice a mother's heart. Now too, she began to venture again from the house (for many days after my return she had hardly left it) and with the baby in her arms to visit the glen, which running up among the cliffs, sheltered the growth of some few trees, and wild-flowers in summer, and where already, since the spring was advancing and the snow melted, fresh grass and buds were beginning to appear, which she loved to gather and put into her baby's hands that she might see it shake them away

again and again. It happened then one day that she had gone up there as usual, with our old Jeannie at her side to help her carry the baby. It was a fine afternoon, windy as it always is on that coast, but with a bright sun shining; and the glen being sheltered from the north, my wife proposed to take the child to its upper end, and be away an hour or more. But she had been gone hardly half that time, when I saw her from my study window run round the corner of the house alone, Jeannie and the child being far behind. The next moment she burst into the room and dropped white as a sheet into a chair.

'Dear love,' I said, 'what ails thee?' and started up to give her a glass of water. But she put it away and sat up, panting and catching her breath with her hand to her side till she could speak.

'Robert,' she said at last, 'you must

send to David Maclean and go away at once; there is not a moment to lose.'

'Do you mean that you have seen any soldiers?' I asked, not a little startled, I own; for the danger had almost passed from my mind.

'Not soldiers—no,' she said, catching her breath again, 'I have seen—oh, Robert, I have seen Malcolm Graham.'

And when she said that, I was more startled than before; for if ever man bore a deadly hatred to another, Malcolm Graham bore such hatred to me. For he was an ill-conditioned man, full of evil passions, and had wanted to marry my wife when she was not yet my wife, but the light and joy of her father's house.

'We met face to face in the glen,' she went on quickly, 'he was coming down as I was going up. Yes, he spoke to me; he asked news of you. He asked if you had recovered from your wound; he smiled as

he spoke, and I would not answer him a word. Then he asked me if you were at home now, and I answered him with a lie, for I saw he knew and suspected something. I told him no, you were in France; and he smiled again and said it was a pleasant country, and bowed and went on. He did not see baby, I thank God for that, she was hidden with Jeannie among the trees. But oh, Robert, I told him a lie—'

And with that my wife flung her arms round my neck and hid her face on my shoulder; for she was hardly more than a child yet, and her father was a strict and God-fearing man.

'And I would tell it twenty times over again to save you from danger,' she said; 'but oh, I wish—I wish I had held my peace, or had had trust in God so as to tell the truth. For a lie is a heavy sin, and evil will come of it, and a judgment be laid upon us.'

When she was grown a little calmer, she began to urge me again to send at once for David Maclean, and seek the refuge I have spoken of. To see David I had no objection; but only a more dire extremity, I determined, should drive me from home; both because I held it cowardly to fly from danger not yet apparent, and also that if Malcolm Graham were lurking about the neighbourhood, I had no mind to leave my wife alone. I knew little of him beyond what I have said; but I knew him for an unscruplous man, careless of means to gain his private ends, and that to annoy my wife might seem to him as legitimate a revenge as to betray me. But though I could not consent to leave the house, we nevertheless sent for David; and telling him what had happened, charged him to keep a strict look-out for news, and above all, to discover if possible the movements of Malcolm Graham. And

further we began to speak more seriously than we had yet done of making our way to France. Mary and I indeed had often talked this over together, since the King's cause being lost for the time in England, I was anxious to share my party's fortunes abroad, and she willing to follow me to the world's end, be it where it might. Only, still doubting and fearing, dear woman-soul, to leave her father's land and cross the stormy spring seas with a child so young as ours, we had agreed, all seeming quiet, to let the matter rest till the season should be somewhat more advanced, and the news which I expected daily, should reach me from abroad. Now, however, it was she who was eager and pressing that we should set out without delay; and to this end David Maclean was desired to watch for a certain small vessel whose captain was well-known to him, and which, plying between our Scottish ports and Dunkirk, from time to time ran

into our bay. In this vessel, he assured us, we might make the voyage without too much discomfort to Mary and the child; also it was now nearly due; only the weather threatening storm with strong winds blowing off the shore, it was not impossible there might be some delay.

After this interview my wife became calmer, since, with a hundred preparations to make for leaving home, she had her hands and mind full, and less time to fret from anxiety. And yet I could see she had resumed her old habit of listening; and twenty times in the day would start and run to the door to look out. Nor would she stir a foot from the house, nor allow me to sit during the day in any but a little room with a bolted door opening out at the back, for escape in case of a surprise. And at night, as she told me afterwards though she would not at the time, she dreamed again and again of

prison gates and a scaffold and thousands of upturned faces, and she and her baby striving and striving to see the face of a prisoner who was being led out, but always pressed back by the crowd.

In this way three days may have passed after my wife's first alarm, and David had seen nothing of the ship, detained, no doubt, by contrary winds; nor of Malcolm Graham, who seemed to have vanished from the country noiselessly as he had come. And my wife rejoicing at this, I would not tell her that to me it was the worst sign of all, and that now for the first time I saw real cause for fear. For life after all is sweet, and the sweeter when dear to those dearest to oneself. I also then took to listening, though I would not let her see it, and sat in expectation, setting my papers in order the while, and packing such few books as I thought to take with me. At last on the even-

ing of the third, or it may have been the fourth day, the blow we looked for fell.

I remember the night as though it had been yesterday; it was among those that do not pass from a man's mind till memory fails in death. The storm that had been rising for three days past was gathering towards its height, and though our walls were thick, we could hear the wind raging round the house with wild moans and sighs as the gusts rose and fell, and shaking our parlour casement as we sat before the fire. The baby had been ailing with some trifling ailment, and Mary had been upstairs with it chief part of the evening; but now it had fallen asleep and Jeannie had taken her place, while she came down to me. She had some warm baby garment in hand which she was fashioning for the voyage; for she thought of nothing now but the voyage, and all fear of the sea had left

her, so that she would have crossed it on the stormiest as on the calmest day. It was ten o'clock, and she had begun to fold up her work and prepare for bed. 'Perhaps to-morrow,' she said, 'the ship will be here.' And at that moment there came a knock at the door. It was David Maclean's knock, and before I could move my wife had flown to open it. The next moment David himself stood within the doorway, lantern in hand, dripping with rain and salt water.

'Is it the ship, David?' my wife cried, breathless.

'Na, na, nae word o' the ship, worse luck to it, but your honour maun come at once,' he replied; 'there's no a moment to lose. The red soldiers are up at the village.'

To my dying day I shall remember my wife's pale face and affrighted eyes. 'Is Malcolm Graham with them?' I asked.

'Na, na, there's nae word o' Malcolm

Graham, but your honour'll please to come at once; the coble's a' ready, and the gear; we maun e'en win through the storm and the dark as we can.'

How it was I know not, but at that moment I felt neither haste nor fear, nor anything but reluctance to quit that dear hearth and all that belonged to it, to leave my wife alone, and the infant sleeping in its cradle upstairs. But with Mary it was far otherwise. In a moment, whilst I hardly knew what she did, she had fastened my cloak and wrapped my plaid round my shoulders; and throwing her own plaid over her head, had thrust me, she clinging the while to my arm, out at the door, along the little garden path, through the wicket and down the waste of sandy grass that lay between it and the beach. My pistols and sword I had already laid hands on in the first moment of alarm; David with the lantern, followed close at our heels;

and thus suddenly I found our peaceful fire-lit home left behind me, and the wild night outside closing in darkness round us.

The night was wild indeed, moonless and starless, with beating rain. The wind howled and whistled in our ears, but through its tumult we could hear the roar of the surf that surged for miles along the rocky shore; and when we reached the beach, we could see the dim white line that lost itself in the night on either hand. A lantern flashed for an instant where the little boat was drawn up on the shingle, and then was darkened, leaving a blackness more pitch than before. My wife and I stood clasped breast to breast; through the darkness I could see her face lifted close to mine; our cheeks were wet with mingled tears and rain. We had spoken no word since we left the house; but now,

'Dear heart,' she said, 'I cannot—cannot leave thee.' And so, clinging closely together, we moved step by step, as by one impulse, down towards the breaking line of surf. All at once she raised her head, which had sunk on my breast. 'Oh, hark,' she said, 'I hear baby crying.' Dear soul, it was but her fancy, for through that wild uproar of wind and surf and rain no sound could reach us from the distant house. But now, as though torn apart by that great anguish of divided longing, her arms fell from my shoulders to her side. A moment longer her hand clung to mine; but as David, his preparations ended, shifted his dark lantern once more, and sent a narrow line of light across the streaming raindrops and up the wet stones, with a sob she tore herself away, and fled up the beach. I think she turned once more; but tears dimmed my own eyes, and

the thick beating of my heart dulled all my senses. In another moment she was lost in the darkness.

I sat down in the bottom of the boat, and we pushed out through the surf on to the tossing invisible sea. And of whither we were going or of how, I seemed to have no clear consciousness; for in that impenetrable blackness, that blotting out of heaven and earth in the elemental rush and roar which obliterated all kindly human sounds, it might, so it seemed to me, have been the immeasurable sea of Eternity, the sea without change or limit, across which we were being driven; hardly could I believe that the sun would ever rise again, or children's voices gladden the ear. If there were danger (and I have sometimes wondered since how so small a boat could live in such a sea, and blessed again those brave hearts that risked their lives for mine), I had no knowledge of it

then; since earthly danger seemed far withdrawn beyond that gulph of darkness which closed us round. And so for two hours, or it may have been for three, since time held no count and left no mark, we made our unseen way. I could not think, I may have tried to pray; but no prayer would come, for horror of the night and unchained blast of the storm; no, not till a vision of my wife, watching and praying beside her baby in our sleeping-room at home, unloosed my soul and turned it towards the Father of all spirits. And just then a louder sound was added to wind and wave, and the dim white line of the surf showed itself again, encircling the island for which we were bound.

So many sunken rocks lay about the little place of refuge, that even in daylight, much more in this Tartarean darkness, it required no small skill to find the one narrow passage into which the boat might

be thrust; so that another hour may have passed in wary touchings at one point and another before the wished-for channel was found and the boat run in. And now, had I been in such a mood, I might have recalled many a boyish dream and vision of romance such as visit young hearts when life is new and all things strange, and beautiful through their strangeness. For, pushing aside some hanging branches, David ran the boat so far as might be, up the little creek to the entrance of a large cave, as I discovered in a moment; when, safe now from all danger of being seen, he opened his lantern and let the light strike up the walls and along the vaulted roof. And never could I describe the joy that light gave me, the sight of his ruddy countenance and the blooming cheeks of the lad, after the nameless weight of blackness through which we had passed; so that I have since thought, rather, but

for the sake of Mary and the child, would I have stayed ashore that night and faced a hundred deaths, than encountered the terrors of that brief voyage.

Now from my heart I thanked my wife for her foresight in causing fuel and provisions to be placed here; for soon we had a fire lighted and some supper prepared, the smoke, escaping in part through the entrance, and in part through some aperture above, causing us little inconvenience. And so presently (I, for one, with a grateful heart) we lay down to sleep; not however, before I had held some consultation with David Maclean as to our future plans. He was to leave the island, so we agreed, before daybreak; and going straight to the tower, was to convey my wife and the baby to her father's house some thirty miles distant, where she would, as I knew, be in perfect safety. Indeed, I had already urged her more than

once to go there, but she had always refused, saying that her husband's house was now her proper home. What next should be done would be matter for future deliberation; in the meantime David was to return, the weather permitting (for the boat, in fact, ran no little danger in those stormy seas), the next night but one, and give an account of what had passed.

When I awoke therefore in the morning, I found myself alone. A dim twilight filled the cave; for though I had slept late and it was fully day, little light could penetrate through the overhanging bushes that hid the narrow entrance. Still I could judge better now than the previous evening of the nature of the place I was in, and found it to be lofty and vaulted, with smaller caverns branching off on either side of the central one, a place curious by its size and its construction. And whether formed by the action of the

waves, or by some convulsion of nature, I knew not, nor have ever known.

Here then I passed the day well enough, occupied by many thoughts, some indeed anxious and heavy, but others not so painful; since the isolation, the strange and savage place, the surging of the sea, and my own situation which had the excitement of peril escaped but not yet overcome, stirred in me a singular sentiment of romance, agreeable as it was novel; which, having a note-book and pencil with me, I strove to set down in verse, but with so little satisfaction to myself that I afterwards tore up the paper and burnt it.

'And I have little doubt,' our host here interrupted himself to say with a smile, 'that it was the best poem my ancestor ever wrote.'

When the night was come—and in my place of refuge it was dark long before the

twilight had faded from sea and sky—I ventured to light the fire which I had feared to kindle during the day, lest the smoke escaping should be visible from a distance. I thought so to cheer my loneliliness, perhaps; but if so, I presently found reason to repent; for as the wood and turf caught and blazed and flamed up, throwing uncouth lights and shadows on the strange walls and roof of my abode, such thoughts lighted up within me as I had never known before, as I have never known since; a darkness of the spirit moreover falling on me, worse even than that blackness of the night before. And such nights as those two I trust in Heaven never to pass again, not even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, which they surely most resembled. For all at once I felt as though imprisoned there alone in the centre of the earth, where no ray from heaven could ever reach me more; and

that in the awful shadows of the cavern which moved with the leaping flames, were lurking all the evil passions my life had ever known; so that a great terror, like no terror of mortal thing, laid hold on me, and my hair seemed to rise on my head, and the minutes were like eternities that have neither beginning nor end, and all my past seemed to fall away from me and be as nothing. So stricken was I indeed, and paralysed by that unknown horror, that I stood, knowing neither whither to turn nor what to do; till, rousing myself desperately, I groped my way to the very mouth of the cave and tore asunder the bushes to look out on the night, thinking that perhaps some kindly star shining in heaven, some friendly light at sea, might lift that awful dread from heart and brain. But the night was black, nay, blacker if possible than the previous one had been; no light was in earth or heaven, and rain and

spray dashed coldly in my face. But even rain and spray were welcome now, as signs from the world from which I was cut off; and while I stood and gazed something blacker seemed to grow out of the blackness, a different strain from the surge of the sea struck upon my ear; a boat's keel grated at the sandy entrance of the cave, and the next moment David Maclean, springing out, set my wife with our infant in her arms at my side.

Good God! how changed looked that haunted spot as I drew her forward into the cave; with what friendly warmth the fire blazed to receive her, as chilled and drenched she drew shivering towards it. The baby lay warm and dry within her plaid; but first of all she thought of it, and then, dear heart, of me; or rather, of us both together, for her eyes sought mine at every turn, and presently she rested in my arms. Nor had we been

parted for an eternity, indeed, instead of for some four-and-twenty hours, could heart have met heart, I think, with a greater passion of tenderness, with a profounder gratitude for reunion after dangers overcome.

She could not stay behind, she told me presently, as we all sat at supper together, the baby sleeping on her knee. (She had shown it to me again and again since she came in, as though some great time had in truth elapsed since I saw it last.) She could not stay behind, and had thought to go out of her mind when David proposed to take her to her father's house. She had made up a bundle, therefore, of such things as she most needed; and going with the child down to David's house, had remained there in hiding all day. Meanwhile the soldiers had searched the neighbourhood, and made sad havoc up at our house, she

feared; seizing every paper they could find, hacking the furniture through sheer wantonness, and tearing up the books; and this last grieved me more than the rest, since I had left no papers there of value, and the furniture was worth but little. And what mattered a ruined home when wife and child were with me here?

And so, Mary continued, when the evening was come, she wrapped up the baby warmly; and the sea being somewhat abated and the child recovered from its ailment, so that she thought it could take no harm—and here she looked earnestly in its little face; but it was sleeping peacefully, and she went on—David brought the boat; and she had minded neither wind nor waves for the thought that she was on her way to me. And when I asked her whether the darkness had given her no

alarms, she answered, no; for always in her mind was the verse of the Psalm: 'The darkness is no darkness unto Thee;' and after God, she trusted in David Maclean. Dear heart, I think she had a braver soul than mine, and one that would never quail before imaginary fears.

Of the ship there was no sign; the storm must have delayed it; and before David left us that night it was agreed that for fear of exciting suspicion he should come no more to the island for a few days (since we had provisions in plenty), unless the ship should appear, or we had some other special need. But on the fourth night, the darkness favouring, he was to come again; for we should be waiting for news, and suspense is hardest of all to bear.

The next day and the beginning of the

next passed peacefully. My wife even in the hurry of departure, had thought of putting into her bundle one or two of my favourite volumes, with which I could entertain my leisure so long as the twilight of the cave allowed me to see the print. Of other light we had none, except the fire at night; for something, and often something essential, being always forgotten at the last moment, we had neglected to bring oil for the little lamp David Maclean had placed here among other things; a want we only discovered after he had left, and it was too late to remedy it. My wife, however, made light of the discomfort, since we were together and the baby lay always warm and well-cradled in her arms; and indeed, we had been parted so much since our marriage, that we seemed in those days never to have finished what we had to say to each other, but talked half the day and night through, planning our

life in France, where it was my intention to take service, if possible; for though I loved books, it was in a soldier's life that my heart's desire lay.

In this way the time passed, and all might have gone well, but towards the middle of the second day the child began to ail. It began to ail; but of what its ailment might be, or of its cause, we had no knowledge whatever; for until then it had always been bright and strong and healthy, and more forward, its mother always told me, than infants are apt to be at that tender age. At first my wife hiding away her fear from herself, would not own that anything was wrong; it was sleepy, she said, or hungry, or fretting for want of fresh air and sunshine. But in a few hours, for children's ailments progress fast, she could no longer shut her eyes to the truth; for the infant, instead of slumbering peacefully in the ruddy warmth of the fire (for it was now night), or sitting

up in its mother's lap, springing and fighting with its little fists and stretching out its feet to the blaze; instead of all this, I say, it lay heavy and waxen-pale, not even wailing and fretting now, but almost motionless with closed eyes and half-open mouth; and presently, as the night drew towards its close, and the dawn, as we could judge, was spreading over the sea outside, it began to refuse all nourishment. Then I saw a look of anguish and wild terror, such as I have never beheld on any other human countenance, come into my wife's eyes. But she said not a word, only wrapped the child more closely in her arms, now pacing the cave with it, now crouching again before the fire, chafing its little hands and feet. And still what ailed it, we could not tell, since this was our first child, and my wife little more than a child herself.

So the night passed and the day dawned, but with it no hope of human aid; for we had no boat with which to reach the land and fetch a doctor, or a woman skilled in infant maladies; nor in this wild weather which still continued, though the storm was fast abating, was there hope of any fishing-boat leaving the shore and coming within hail. I cursed my want of forethought now in bidding David Maclean leave us for three days alone in this remote and savage spot; but cursing or repentance alike were of little avail. For presently, as the day wore on, the baby fell into strong convulsions from which it rallied only to fall into them again; and I pray God I may never again know aught like the anguish of those helpless hours when I could only come and go, watching the sufferings of those dearest to me on earth. Nor had I known before how large a space of hope

my little daughter filled in my future life, how close the name of father lay upon my heart.

It might have been towards three or four in the afternoon, for the grey twilight that was all we knew of day was beginning to fade; though not to leave us in utter darkness, since all that day we had never thought of putting out the fire, whose light and warmth were needful for the child. It might have been then between three and four, and my wife had laid the infant down for an instant on its little bed whilst she attended to some necessary trifle, when I heard a noise behind me, and looking round, saw a man coming towards us through the firelight and dusk. At first I thought it was David, and with a sudden hope went quickly down the sloping floor of the cave to meet him. But as he came nearer, I saw that it was Malcolm Graham. He had a smile on his face as he approach-

ed us. Lurking, hidden for greater certainty no doubt, in the neighbourhood, with eye and ear alert like the hunter's for every trace of the hunted prey, he may have tracked us that day by the smoke that must have risen from our fire. However that may have been—and I never learned—he was there before our eyes; our poor refuge was discovered, our last hope betrayed. For advancing with that same evil smile, he looked us well in the face; then turned to leave the cave with such treacherous purpose in his heart as it were no riddle to guess. As he turned (it had all passed in a moment, and stunned by its suddenness, I had not even moved since I discovered it was he) Mary looked up and saw him also.

I suppose there may in truth be inspirations, that like God's angels, descend straight from heaven. My wife can have had no time to think or reason; nay, I

know not how she can have had time to realize what was taking place; nor could she in talking of it afterwards, ever clearly recal what she had done, still less what impulse moved her. But in an instant she had sprung to her feet; and rushing past Malcolm Graham to the entrance of the cave where the little boat in which he had come was grounded in the sand, with a mighty effort she pushed it out to sea; so that, wind and tide both setting from our island, it floated right away. Then coming back, without casting so much as one look on Malcolm Graham, imprisoned now along with us, she knelt down again by the infant's side to take it in her arms. And I believe at that time neither of us gave one thought more to the man who had come there with such treacherous intent; for just then the baby's face changed; it put up its little arms, gasping with wide open eyes; and even as its mother took it up,

with one last struggle its sweet life passed away.

At first she would not lay it down, but clasping it wildly to her breast, began to pace with it to and fro, as she had done on many a wakeful night at home; pausing now and again to gaze for a moment in its face, only to press it then more closely to her bosom with quick-hurrying steps, as though to fly from the anguish of her grief; and in truth I do not know how mortal spirit is framed to bear such agony as was laid on hers then. But presently, going up to her, I drew her gently towards the little couch; and taking the dead baby from her arms which at first resisted, then yielded to my touch, I laid it down again and closed its eyes, so that it seemed to lie sleeping and at rest. Then the mother, stooping over it, did all else that needed to be done, composing its little limbs and smoothing some downy locks

under its cap (shedding no tear the while for the great spasm of grief that held her heart) till the infant lay there still and straight with the print not of life, but of immortality on its face. When all was ended, she knelt down, and spreading out her arms, encircled the child and hid her face in the pillow. So we stayed motionless and silent, for how long a time I took no note.

At last I roused myself to make up the fire, which was dying out, and coming back, raised up my wife and led her in front of the blaze. For her hands were icy cold, and she shook now and shivered and trembled as before some strong blast; turning her eyes too on me from time to time, whilst I chafed her hands, as who should say, 'Help me.' And I, alas, alas! had no help to give; only my great love that seemed to her then, as I too well knew, a thing very far off; even as the love of our Father in Heaven seems too

often a strange and far-off thing to the broken hearts of His children. Only at last, seeing that she made no resistance to what I did, I fetched some food and wine and made her take them, for she had touched nothing that day.

All this time we had seen and heard nothing of Malcolm Graham. Mary, I believe, had clean forgotten him; indeed, she afterwards told me as much. But for myself, though I gave him no thought, I had always the consciousness of his presence near us; and it added to the bitter anger risen in my heart against the man who was the cause of our misery, that in so sacred and awful an hour as this my wife and I should not be alone.

Looking round the cave now, I saw that he had thrown himself upon a heap of sand in a dark and remote corner; and since he was in a sense our prisoner and dependent on us, I took some food to

place near him. I dreaded to see his face, for I felt that if it still had on it the smile it wore when he entered the cave, the devil would urge and God alone could prevent some deed that would weigh on my soul for ever. But his face was pressed upon his arms against the rocky wall; and when at my approach he turned it slowly round, it wore a look so piteous and haggard that a strange compassion for the man who had wronged us began to fill my heart. And I have often thought since that if, as I have reason to believe, a true repentance had begun to work within him, no sharper penance could have been devised than those hours he spent as spectator of the sad and woeful ruin he had wrought. To speak to him then, however, was beyond my power; and he, having looked at me in silence for a moment, turned his face again to the wall; and so I left him.

All my care now was to persuade my wife to go to rest; since in an hour or two David Maclean might be looked for according to our agreement, and it was my wish that we should dig the grave there in the spot where we were. For as my wife and I sat hand clasped in hand before the fire, I had turned the matter over in my mind. And first I thought that dear treasure should be entrusted to David to be buried in our little churchyard far among the hills. But then I thought that we ourselves might never see our land more, and its grave would remain strange to us, and in its last resting-place we should have no part; so that sooner would the mother lay it here in this spot consecrated by her grief and by that sweet parting breath. Also, in other days, if so we willed, we might return to take it away and plant that immortal seed (since such is our faith) in other ground

where it and we might rest together. But of all this I said no word to my wife; knowing, as I did by the pang that cut my own heart at the thought of that little form being hidden for ever from our eyes, what keener wound, what more exquisite anguish would rend her tender soul. Only presently, by such persuasions as I could use, I tried to induce her to go to rest. At first she would not, and I knew that in her heart was the thought of the icy blank where till now warm love had lain at her breast; but at last—for she was always docile, sweet soul, where her own will was concerned—'If I may have baby, Robert,' she said; and with that her mouth quivered a little; but her eyes were always tearless and wide open, as though they would never close again. So she went away into an inner cave that we had made our sleeping-place, and lifting the little couch with its burthen, I placed it beside

her; and presently she lay still, with her arm stretched out over the baby. Whether she slept, I do not know; but she lay there motionless as her little one at her side.

This done, I went down to the mouth of the cave, to await David's arrival, and look out on the sea and sky. There were stars for the first time these many nights past, and a dim expanse of tossing waves visible, sinking to calm. I could see lights here and there on the water where the fishing-boats were putting out again to sea, and one light that burned steadily and never moved, as of a ship at anchor. With all my heavy grief and trouble, something, I own, of hope and life began stirring and reviving in my heart at these friendly signs in sky and earth. For to fight one's way, sword in hand, with blows given and blows received and Heaven above all, through the troubles of life, is

a portion that every man worthy of the name claims as the best that life can give. But to stand helpless, bound, cut off from the open day and common fellowship of man, to witness and to share an anguish that one cannot touch, is to be in a strait so narrow, an abyss so black, that I pray God I and mine may be in our graves rather than pass through the like again.

I was still gazing when I heard the plash of oars close at hand, and looking, saw the boat with David and his son. He sprang out joyfully, with good tidings written on his face. The ship was come, he said, and at daybreak to-morrow would stand out again to sea. We were to join it, and be on board by seven o'clock. In a few words I told him all that had happened, and his countenance changed and fell; for he loved us all, and a hundred times had held our baby on his knee.

We went back into the cave, for there

was no time to lose; by daybreak or soon after we must be on our way. I looked in on my wife; but all was still and dark where she was resting with that sweet unearthly presence at her side. As for Malcolm Graham, he lay face downwards now on the ground away in his dark corner, his head buried in his arms. He may have been sleeping; I do not know; we none of us approached him to see.

We chose a spot opposite the mouth of the cave, where the vault rose high overhead, where, as we fondly fancied, through that eastern entrance, a red ray from the rising sun might visit it now and then. We chose it far back from the highest point of the tide, though the ground sloped so steeply upwards, that there was little fear that in the roughest weather the water would penetrate above or below. The sand was soft and readily moved, and that was well, for we had no proper imple-

ments to dig with; and although we worked steadily and hard, yet the greater part of the night was gone before we had made a bed so deep that I felt sure our infant might sleep there in unmoved peace. But it was done at last.

And when it was done, the worst moment of all lay before me; I must rouse my wife to tell her that I was come to take away her baby. Nor do I know indeed how I could have accomplished such a task, but that she, lying there waking and watchful I suppose, though motionless, must have known what was going forward. For when I went in with the lantern in my hand, she rose up at once (she was already dressed, having lain down in her clothes) trembling from head to foot again as on the night before. She knelt down by the baby, and drawing off the plaid that covered it, looked down on its placid face, with her hand held tightly on

her heart; then smoothing the pillow under its head, and the folds of its little night-gown about its feet, she wrapped the long plaid again round and about it; and so (her lips clinging at the last to its baby lips, as though never to be severed) she lifted it in her arms, its little head still laid on the pillow, and herself carried it into the outer cave where the grave was dug. She it was who gave it into David Maclean's arms as he stood ready to receive it, the tears running down his face; he laid it down very gently, and I, standing there, with my arm round my wife, repeated the Lord's Prayer; for I could think of no other words with which to pray. David laid another plaid at the bottom of the grave, hiding the little form wholly from our view; and then I led my wife away, for her weight lay heavy on my arm, and I thought she would have swooned.

But she did not swoon; she only lay on

my breast like a stone, whilst that sad work went on in the outer cave. Nor was it possible to leave her long even in that woeful indulgence of grief, for time was passing and we must needs be gone. I wished to do no more than wrap her cloak about her, and lead her to the boat. But when she saw what I would be at, she broke away from me, and first standing as one bewildered, began to look round her for one thing and another. I saw then it was for her baby's things she was seeking, and began to help her collect them; when all at once, at the sight of some little garment, some empty woollen shoe, she, who till now had not shed a tear, broke into an agony of weeping, with such sobs, such tears, such heart-rending, heart-broken sorrow, that I wonder our heart-strings did not in truth crack, and we, with that sorry story of our lives, pass into the eternal silence.

Yet when that convulsion was ended, she rose, shaken indeed, but more collected than she had yet been, and began quickly to put together every little thing that had belonged to the child, for there was now no time to lose. Whilst she was so occupied, I went to consult with David as to what should be done with Malcolm Graham; since to let him loose again upon our track till all danger was past, seemed a thing not to be thought of. David was for leaving him there in the cave with food till we should be safely across the water. But remembering the horror of loneliness that had closed in upon me that first night, I was averse from leaving any fellow-mortal to endure, perhaps, a similar torture; nor, to say the truth, could I bear the thought of leaving our baby in such company as his, that innocent grave to the guardianship of such a watcher. Of these reasons, however, I said nothing, urging only other

objections; suggesting rather he should be taken in the ship with us to France, whence he could make his own way back. To which David demurring, as doubtful what the captain might say to another passenger, we were still debating the point when Malcolm Graham himself stood before us. In all those hours I do not know that he had moved; in our bitter grief he had had no part; and what the hours had brought him, I cannot say, but I never looked upon the face of man so changed as his. But in this life also, men go down into hell, and meet their evil deeds face to face.

'Do what you will with me,' he said, 'but I swear before God I have no thought of ill towards you any more.' And with that he went down on his knees and lifted up his hands. 'You do not trust me,' he said, after a pause. 'So be it; take me where you will.'

I could not trust the man at once, and

no doubt my face showed it. But at that moment my wife spoke. She had come to my side, her cloak closely wrapped round her, the hood drawn forward over her face. She was ready to depart.

'I trust you, Malcolm,' she said. 'Come with us now, and afterwards David Maclean shall row you back to the shore.'

After that no one said a word; and so, sorrowfully and silently, we got one by one into the boat, and David and his son took the oars. The storm was gone, the sun was newly risen over a world new-made, and was shining on a blue and rippling sea; behind us the line of coast lay receding and melting in the distance. Once my wife looked back to where our tower stood at the foot of the glen; then drawing her cloak more closely round her, she hid her face on my shoulder and grieved with that grief with which no man intermeddleth.

In about two hours we reached the ship.

A ladder was let down over the side, and my wife and I prepared to go. Then Malcolm Graham stood up again before us.

'Forgive me,' he said. But again I could not answer. For the evil he had worked, and the anguish he had brought on my wife, were heavy upon me. Only she, dear soul, because she had suffered most, found forgiveness in her heart.

'You are forgiven, Malcolm,' she said, 'try to be a better man.'

'So be it,' I said then, and left him standing there. We have never seen his face again, and know little of what became of him afterwards; but I doubt greatly whether he came to much good, for he was a man of violent passions and irregular life. Of his repentance towards us, however, I do not doubt, nor have ever had any reason to doubt.

We bade farewell to David on board the ship, and to me it was a sore wrench

to part with him; not only for the service he had done us, which could never be repaid, but that he stood to me at that moment for country, home, kinsmen, and all. For my wife, I think she had but one sad thought that pressed closer and closer on her heart and shut out all heaven and earth by degrees. And so we sailed, and in about three days made the coast of France. After that my wife had a long illness, during which, in the delirium of fever, she would always cling to the little bundle of her baby's things, pressing it to her heart and rocking it backwards and forwards in a way most pitiful to behold —too pitiful to write of further here.

Many years have passed since then. I found service in France, and we have never seen our own land again. It is changing greatly, I hear, and the hopes crushed on that fatal day at Culloden,

have never fully revived. For ourselves we have prospered; sons and daughters, both fair and strong, are growing up about us; but the dear presence that first informed us with what love the Father of all informs a parent's heart, lives unchanged from its sweetness in our memory. We have never disturbed its innocent rest. David Maclean at our desire set up a stone carved and inscribed, to mark the spot; and as time has gone on the thought has grown dear to us of that lonely grave, sublime in its solitude, visited by red glimpses of the dawn, consecrated by the solemn chant of wind and wave that ceases neither by day nor night about its seagirt walls.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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